

“DIRECT ME, I BESEECH YOU, TO CARCOSA”: A CASE STUDY OF LITERATURE, PLAGIARISM, AND RETRANSLATION

Davi Silva Gonçalves^{1*}

¹Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste, Guarapuava, Paraná, Brasil

Abstract

This research delineates an interface between literature, plagiarism, and retranslation – having Jorge Luis Borges’ (1979) concept of creative infidelity as main theoretical framework – based on my own principles and experience as a literary translator. More specifically, I use the software *WCopyFind* for comparing my retranslation of “An Inhabitant of Carcosa” (Bierce, 1886) into Brazilian Portuguese (2015) with both the original and João Reis’ previous translation into European Portuguese (2010) – bearing in mind that, before publishing my translation, I also went through the latter. Reflecting upon retranslation, translation, and literature, I get to the conclusion that no personal choice is devoid of external influences – especially in what regards the former. Variation is nonetheless inevitable, for texts are not formed only by words, but also by what surrounds them. The discursive strength of translation, therefore, resides in the troposphere of meaning, above what is written on the surface of a text.

Keywords: Borges; Carcosa; Retranslation; Plagiarism; Literature.

* Possui Licenciatura em Letras Inglês e Literaturas Correspondentes pela Universidade Estadual de Maringá (2010); Bacharelado em Tradução em Língua Inglesa pela mesma instituição (2011); Mestrado (com bolsa CAPES) em Estudos Linguísticos e Literários em Língua Inglesa pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (PPGI/2014); e Doutorado (também com bolsa CAPES) na área de Teoria, Crítica e História da Tradução na mesma instituição (PGET/2017). Atualmente é Professor de Literaturas de Língua Inglesa no Departamento de Letras da Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste (UNICENTRO-PR). Seu e-mail é gdavi1210@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-8825-2859.



“Good writers borrow, great writers steal.”
(T. S. Elliot or Oscar Wilde or Pablo Picasso or...)

Introduction: Inhabiting Carcosa

In the words of Coulthard et al. (2011), “at its simplest, plagiarism, or more accurately the type of plagiarism linguists are competent to deal with, is the theft, or unacknowledged use, of text created by another” (p. 523). Setting off from this definition, my research proposes to delineate an interface between the issues of literature, plagiarism, and retranslation, based on the analysis of my own experience as a literary translator. Even though the aforementioned definition might sound crystal-clear to some readers, there is a lot of discussion in the milieu of originality and copy – and, when it goes to literature, translation, and retranslation, the situation can become even more confusing. This nonetheless does not make such discussion less enthralling; on the contrary, in the contemporaneity people seem even more interested in the issue of plagiarism, everywhere: “There has certainly been an increase in the perceptions of plagiarism, in part due to the media attention attracted by high profile cases” (Sousa-Silva, 2014 p. 71). Such increase would end up allowing the appearance of software programmes (one of which is applied within this article) and the institutionalisation of anti-plagiarism practices. Today, therefore, there is a consistent body of strategies and techniques to assess, discover, and prevent this practice from taking place – or at least from passing unnoticed; but those processes are still pretty much directed towards plagiarism as we know it (notwithstanding the fact that those who plagiarise well are constantly changing their *modus operandi*). Within such a scene, studies such as the one carried out by Sousa-Silva (2014) demonstrate how translation was gradually turned into a fruitful channel for plagiarists to act. It is also true, however, that “translation has been rarely approached as a plagiarism strategy, and research into this area has been very limited, or has demonstrated disappointing results” (Sousa-Silva, 2014 p. 73). The significance of my research is thus structured upon the necessity to strengthen the link translation/plagiarism – relying on translated and retranslated literature as evidence.

Temporal and spatial journeys then play a rather crucial role as regards to the dialogues provided by literary discourses. Each of these discourses, we are now aware, operate within and because of time – there is neither beginning nor ending, only one more piece of information being inserted inside the milieu of a ubiquitous condition: the condition of endlessness, inherent to art. It is essential, for such journey to occur, that its crew becomes aware of what sort of aircraft they are about to get on; choosing where we are setting from and where we aim at landing is not quite enough inasmuch as there are numberless manners for that to happen. Processes such as assimilation, transformation, and recreation are also inherent to art – and this necessary condition blurs the frontiers separating what is original from what perhaps might be judged as a copy in the literary realm. I do agree with Coulthard et al. (2011, p. 537) when they pose that plagiarism requires

a quantitative and qualitative assessment involving “manual and computational generation of results and careful analysis and interpretation in order to provide an opinion”. However, before such opinion is drawn, one must be aware that, in what concerns literature, things never emerge simply out of the blue – the greatest insights always come from somewhere else. “Time accumulates experiences on the artist, as it does with all men. By force of omissions and emphasis, of memory and forgetfulness, time combines some of those experiences and thus it elaborates the work of art” (Borges, 1979, p. 310). The idea that we influence and are directly influenced by time through this force of omissions and emphasis, and due to what we memorise and what we forget, would gradually shape his key positioning regarding the task of the translator – whose work would demand him/her to raise his/her awareness to the fact that there is no neutrality. The main premise here is that translators create – but even creation seems, to Borges, to be not such a straightforward word as it may seem to other theorists. What he called creation would have nothing to do with originality, or any possibility of complete ingenuity, as he saw such creation as “a mixture of forgetting and remembering what we have read” (p. 170).

Based upon previous readings that are remembered or forgotten, literature gains shape – original ideas are copied and copied ideas are transformed into original ones. The authorship of the most classic texts is, apropos, a mystery to everyone. As Coulthard and Johnson (2007, p. 184) remind us, “no one knows who composed *Beowulf* or *The Odyssey*, nor even whether they ever had a single author, nor how many mouths they passed through and how many alterations they underwent, before they were committed to paper”. They continue to say that translating has often been the manner whereby the reading minority could ultimately get in touch with literary texts – texts that, on their turn, “were seen to belong to the community rather than to any individual author” (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007, p. 185). This is why the discussion regarding classic writers’ habit of plagiarising is irrelevant – after all, the modern notion of textual ownership does not apply to their differing temporal and spatial constraints. Much is said for instance about Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets, sensationalist debates are broadcast, inflated criticisms written, and books about the “dark side” of his originality published and sold like hotcakes. I have no intention to enter such arena for its combats are, if you will, nothing but useless. It is true that “Shakespeare did not acknowledge his sources, though he borrowed massively for his plots, but neither did anyone accuse him of plagiarism” (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007, p. 186). There is no doubt that, in the contemporaneity, such practice would never be set aside as innocuous: what Shakespeare did is, today, taken as plagiarism. This is not to say nonetheless that such change has taken place because we are now in a fairer world; neither are we more eager to value the work of the artists of our time (unfortunately). In the space separating artists from those who consume their art a figure has emerged: that of the publishing houses. “Publishers realised that they needed to defend ‘their’ texts in order to protect their investment” (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007, p. 187).

The image we have (re)created of Shakespeare evinces indeed rather well the need to reassess how plagiarism is to be addressed in what regards the world of art and of its production and reproduction (legible or not). In a nutshell, the literary market – if we can call it that – wherein his texts were inserted was one that had very little control over issues such as original and/or recycled texts and ideas. “Plays were carefully preserved by the companies, and represented a considerable capital value as part of their stock. If a company was disbanded, they were divided among the sharers, and old plays thus got upon the market” (Chambers, 1988, p. 96). As would happen to any other author, Shakespeare’s company was the “real” owner of his plays – such as the music composed by classic musicians belonged to the church whereto they were sold. The notion of authorship – and, as a result, of plagiarism – would emerge much later, even though we have created the image of an author, with a legacy and a trajectory, with texts and poems of his own. It is impossible, however, to say how personal his words are, because the context of his writing is one that inflicted great changes to these texts – which, in the end, did not belong to anyone in particular. If we cannot talk of author’s intention in the contemporaneity, let alone in Elizabethan times, when playwrights had to accommodate their texts to the stage-structure and to the available actors of a given theatre at a given date – redistributing speeches, and redirecting performances. The time granted for a play to be set would also be altered and, consequently, impinge upon the textual material; even the audience itself had an impact on its endless rewriting. As a result, we do not know how much of Shakespeare’s manuscripts are ideas of his own or suggestions, blunders, and requirements of those who helped, conducted, influenced, or censored him. “We may distinguish various kinds of adaptation..., and it is necessary to consider the operation of the agencies through which such adaptation was carried out and their effect upon the ‘final’ play” (Chambers, p. 98). Concisely, it would be fair to say that what we have today is but a subjective construction:

The material available, although it is fairly abundant, has been pieced together from many sources; but Shakespeare’s bare unannotated texts are already a reconstruction, due to generations of scholars, working by patient comparison and less patient conjecture upon the discrepant and often dubious versions handed down from the seventeenth century. These are problems of transmission, of authenticity, of revision, of chronology. How far can the reconstructed text, after all, be accepted as a faithful rendering of the form in which Shakespeare left the plays? Did he himself alter or rewrite what he at first composed? Was he the sole author of what passes under his name, or is his work, through adaptation or collaboration, entangled in the traditional canon with that of other men? (Chambers, p. 94)

Interesting as they are, I have no intention here to try answering these questions – and to those who wish to do so I wish good luck. Shakespeare is to me but an example of my reflection upon literature – be it original, translated, or retranslated. Furthermore, Borges’ inventive ideas regarding the process of creation consist of the main theoretical cornerstone for what I shall endeavour to

effect hereinafter: analysing my retranslation (or rewriting) of “An Inhabitant of Carcosa” (Bierce, 1886). Such analysis relies on a quantitative comparison of my text with two other sources: Ambrose Bierce’s original short story (automatically translated by the Google tool) and João Reis’ translation of it from American English into European Portuguese, bearing in mind that, before publishing my translation, I went through both these texts more than once. Have I been creative or have I plagiarised? Only God knows or, better, only *WCopyFind*¹ – the “plagiarism software” I rely on for doing such comparison. If creating has to do with remembering and/or forgetting what we have previously read, then there would not be so many differences between the processes of writing and/or rewriting, would there? Not if we agree that we are “all the heirs of millions of scribes who have already written down all that is essential a long time before us. We are all copyists, and all the stories we invent have already been told; there are no longer any original ideas” (Borges, 1999, p. 74). Questionable as it may seem for some, Borges’ innovative views on the process of poetic creation ended up opening a stubborn discussion that still occurs within the academic arena; and such discussion concerns the issue of translation and of its artistic autonomy. Texts exist because we write, but they survive because we translate – and, for such process of survival to take place, the relation is never one of dependence, but of interdependence.

When Borges poses that we are all copyists, and that every story has already been told, he discredits, without hesitating, the unfathomable tradition wherein notions such as fidelity and/or originality have for long (perhaps far too long) been the centre of translation researchers’ worries. It would be fair, therefore, to say that when one looks at literature and at translation s/he must be aware that the “original” meaning of a work is not accessible any longer – perhaps it has actually never been whatsoever. This is why, “given a choice, he [Borges] preferred to discuss literary effects rather than the meaning of literary works; and he could not countenance any talk about literary theory that did not address the craft of writing” (Kristal, xviii). It is much easier (and maybe less farfetched) to talk about literary effects to the detriment of literary meanings – to reflect upon what a literary discourse *does* rather than about what it *is* – and when such a shift of perspective impinges upon the process of translation it grants it a new status. When the translator (and re-translator) is finally able to dodge the phantom of the original s/he is endowed with an opportunity to see him/herself effectively as both a producer and reproducer (as the frontiers between former and latter are mitigated, not to say extinguished). Nevertheless, for the object of my analysis’ components and idiosyncrasies to be properly tackled (and for comparing Bierce’s original text with the other two versions brought herein), before effectively setting my research forth it would be wise to present briefly some basic information about it. The story of this tale is, apropos, an evidence that literature, foreign or domestic, operates in a continuum – wherein all frontiers dividing what is created from what is recreated becomes a little bit blurred. “An Inhabitant of Carcosa”, whose title I have translated simply to “Carcosa” in my

Brazilian Portuguese version (so as to boost the gloomy aether that permeates it), is one of the most influential horror stories ever written, having become the source for diverse following references which start in the nineteenth century and keep up to the contemporaneity.

There is no definitive consensus regarding where the name of Bierce's fictional city comes from, but one of the most credited theories allege that the author was inspired by the city of Carcassonne. This consists of a historical city located – today – in the French territory and well known for its medieval architecture (which has by the way motivated its addition to UNESCO World Heritage list in 1997). After it was published in *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians* (1891), "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" would, in turn, serve as inspiration for many other writers, such as R. W. Chambers, contemporary to Bierce. In the stories of *The King in Yellow* (1895), Chambers makes many references to Bierce's works – being the usage of a city called Carcosa perhaps the most recurrent. Later, H. P. Lovecraft, another reference when one thinks of horror stories, would also mention "Carcosa" in his masterpiece: *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* (1928). Many others – e.g. Joseph S. Pulver, Karl Edward Wagner, James Blish, Paul Edwin Zimmer, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Lin Carter, Michael Cisco, John Tynes, John Clute, David Drake, Alan Moore and even George Martin – are all among those who have contributed to this circle of references. Outside the literary chambers, more present-day and popular allusions might be spotted – such as the television series *Game of Thrones*, broadcast since 2011, and *True Detective*, since 2014, both mentioning Carcosa and/or even bringing the city as main background. All these hints and indications end up inevitably promoting the maintenance of Carcosa's imaginary that, motivated by this tradition, lingers on within the current literary atmosphere. Hence the pertinence of this study, whose framework is a very original work that has inspired a vast array of many other original works, as well as its translations and retranslations. We know something is original when people feel eager to copy it, we know a literary project has worked when people feel like translating it, and we know a story shall never perish when we find out it never stops being retranslated.

Discussion: Bierce's literature as a collective project

In my analysis, I start from an overall comparison between my full retranslation of "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" with the original text and its previous translation to European Portuguese and get to a more detailed reading of two key moments of the narrative. These are: 1) The opening of the story, when Bierce provides us with a reflection upon death; and 2) the moment when the inhabitant of Carcosa meets the "stranger" and tries unsuccessfully to establish a dialogue with him. It is fair to say that relying on Borges' cold-shouldered views on translation as the main scaffold for my (re)production of Bierce's text in Portuguese is not only a treacherous choice – it actually opens up a considerable space for criticism (I do enjoy a fight, though). When he says that "his translations transform his originals

into drafts that precede them”, Borges sets aside a hierarchy that is well established within the literary realm (a hierarchy where there is no doubt that translations represent a less significant role, as translation and translator are per se historically peripheral to the literary scope). From these reflections, one might infer that Borges is setting off from his own experience as a cyclical re-creator of his literary works – which he deemed inherently unfinished, even when the original writer himself endeavours to take up the writing anew. It is true, nonetheless, that he not only theorises but actually fictionalises successfully upon such issue, as “his own literary works transform his readings into a repertoire of possibilities in which his own translations, and his views about translation, play a decisive role” (Kristal, xx). Indeed, if one stops to look at the processes of writing, translating, and retranslating, there would be no way to determine if there is a minor or major task among them – even their differences shrink as the obvious converging points between creating and recreating are taken into account. As a matter of fact, the notion of literary production would be more consistent with the idea of a nonlinear circle, and this is why, sometimes, the idea of a source and a target might sound rather problematic. What I mean is that these words are based upon the premise that there are predefined literary steps, and that, if someone is to be unfaithful, such person is, definitely, the translator.² Actually, what translators face is the same repertoire of possibilities faced by the common reader; the text one reads is not a closed and finished text, but a draft that precedes such reading. Within such picture, if the translator allows him/herself to be enslaved by the illusion of the original meaning s/he would end up reducing the authority of the new effects which his/her text is liable to provide. If every reader translates meanings through interpretation – and if all stories we invent have already been told – then every translation is inevitably a retranslation, for every text is to some extent inherently chained to (an)other text(s). Therefore, and since literature proves to be one of the most effective means of freeing us from our limitations, why would literary translation allow itself to operate as if controlled by invisible chains that we ourselves decide to place there?

Translating, after all, does not have to do with trying to overlook distances between original, translation, and retranslations, but with accepting and manipulating such distance in one’s own terms, regardless of how petulant such behaviour might seem to be.³ The translation tool that I have selected nonetheless endorses my petulance; which is that of Borges’ creative infidelity: the liberty he grants us, translators, when offering us immunity for inventing, creating, and transforming. His own experience as a translator, as mentioned, informs us regarding such reflections on creative infidelity, after all “Borges would have few scruples about editing the original as he translated. A good translator, according to him, might choose to treat the original as a good writer treats a draft of a work in progress” (Kristal, p. 2). Every work would thus be in process, so translating would not be analogous to picking up a finished text, nor would it have to do with finishing such text in another context; the work is in progress, and all the translator is being asked to do is to keep it flowing – giving it continuity, not an

end. Both Bierce's "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" and Reis' translation "*Um Habitante de Carcosa*" would be understood, from such a perspective, as the drafts I have chosen as the palimpsest whereby I could design my own draft, which is among the many other drafts that are already available. That is, what impinges upon the reading of a book is the reading of many books that precede it; and what affects my translation of Bierce's short story is also my previous reading and translating of many other works (just as it is true of the original). This is to say that the translator is not a minor writer, nor that s/he is a major writer; there are no levels in the process of artistic creation, there are only layers of difference (a difference that cannot be measured in terms of value or ranking). The author has done his job, so has the Portuguese translator; accessing both texts, I am here doing mine – the translation of the novel into Brazilian Portuguese. One does not need to characterise authors, translators, and re-translators barely as opponents. One does not need to categorise them as if dividing the world between what is old and what is new, what came first and what came later, as the original and the copies, as unrefined and improved. There is no need to think dualistically; after all every literary production is nothing but a "collective project" (Borges, 1999, p. 24).

As a collective project, the original "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" (1886), Reis' translation and my retranslation shall be seen in this study as three versions of a fluid narrative – one that has been rewritten repetitively. To analyse their resemblances and/or variances, I have planned the following methodology: using *WCopyFind*, I generated three different files. The first provides us with a comparison between Reis' previous translation of the short story (2010) and my (re)translation (2015); the second compares Reis' translation and with Bierce's original (after automatically translated by Google into Portuguese); and the third is a comparison between my retranslation with Bierce's original text (same process here). For the three comparisons, I tried to have the minimum of three words as the shortest phrase to match; besides, I chose to neglect all punctuation, numbers, letter case, and to skip non-words. The first comparison showed that there are 136 matches (9%) between Reis' translation and my retranslation; the second that there are 295 matches (20%) between Reis' translation and Bierce's original text; and the third generated no results because there are no matches between Bierce's text and my own that go beyond the maximum of two words. For that reason, I reduced the amount of words as the shortest phrase to match from three to two words, and then the comparison between Bierce's text and my retranslation – with the minimum of two words instead of three – displayed the amount 239 matches (16%). Two hypotheses might be drawn from this initial analysis. 1) Regardless of Gambier's idea that retranslations tend to produce texts closer to the original source (i.e. the first translator would be more worried with adapting a text to the target audience while the second, third, etc. would privilege the source context and textual aspects),⁴ in this study this has proven not to be the case whatsoever. Even though Reis translated the short story five years before I did, in terms of vocabulary choices and sentence structure his text is much more equivalent to Bierce's (mediated by google) than mine. 2) Nevertheless,

notwithstanding how “original” my retranslation seems to be if one takes into account only its comparison with Bierce’s original (they are rather distant from one another), the fact that there is on the other hand much more in common between Reis’ translation and my own might mean something after all. Falling back on the previous translation might have unconsciously predisposed some of my choices – and, at the same time, pre-empted other possibilities for my retranslating what Reis had already translated.

Although that is, paradoxically, incoherent with my view on translations and especially retranslations, which I understand as opportunities for one to swerve from pre-given trajectories, as a chance to move towards a different direction, these previous comparisons demonstrate how impossible it is not to be affected and even guided by an already established tradition. Controversially, the access to previous texts is precisely what lays the groundwork for the conception of a brand-new one – finding equivalences between Bierce’s text and my own has been a hard work. This is so because the muddling of what is “original” and what is incorporated – of what is “maintained” and what is invented – provides the translator with very interesting groundwork (and the inverted commas are there to reinforce the subjectivity of both originality and maintenance as purported to be reliable stances). 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 (Paula, p. 118).⁵ The tradition that places centrality in the original text is not still in vogue by chance; translating is also about power relations, and, when it comes to power, it is very significant to determine which text is less in rank. The point is that hegemonic traditions have always made use of peripheral texts to model their specific literary systems; what Borges is telling us is that it is high time the margin started doing likewise. Bierce has written an “original” text in his context, Reis’ has translated such text as originally, and I have used both sources to write an original one of my own. Translators are scientists experimenting with the elements provided by every source they wish to recur to – the experiments’ results are a mystery, but something always comes out of that process. The literary meanings emerging from my version of Bierce’s story are thus other meanings now – provided by another reading that has produced another text for other readers. That is, even though the original meaning might never be accessed (once “original meanings” shall always consist of a remote subject), effects might be empowered if creative infidelity is summoned – and, if there is something my translation of “An Inhabitant of Carcosa” seems to be, “infidel” would indeed be a good word to describe it:

Existem várias maneiras de perecer. *Em algumas* delas, o corpo permanece no mundo físico. *Em outras*, ele se desvanece em consonância com o espírito. Tal evento ocorre geralmente em isolamento e, já que os sujeitos estão fadados a ser comumente ignorantes acerca do fim que se aproxima, diz-se *que o homem* se vê só, ou que ele então inicia uma *longa jornada* – o *que*, de certa forma, condiz com a realidade. Por outro lado, é também verdade que, *em outras* ocasiões, tal evento se configura não em isolamento,

mas na presença *de muitos*, algo evidenciado por dezenas de testemunhos. Em certas mortes do corpo também morre *o espírito*, independentemente da muitas vezes destoante vitalidade de um em comparação ao outro. Como também atestado, ainda que *o espírito* venha a se extinguir *junto com o* falecimento do corpo, é sabido que em múltiplos casos o primeiro acaba por se reerguer enquanto o segundo continua a repousar. (Bierce, trans. Gonçalves, 2015, p. 3, emphasis added)

All the emphases in this excerpt are not in the original text, but were added by *YCopyFind* – which notices the resemblances between word choice in my retranslation and Reis’ previous translation of Bierce’s short story. On the whole, there are nine passages (with sequences of two and three words) that occur in both texts, and none of them has – luckily – raised my suspicion in terms of plagiarism so far. When compared to Bierce’s original (automatically translated by the Google tool), there were only three passages that occurred both in his and my text – which endorses my hypothesis that I am closer to the previous translation than to the source text. Reis’ translation, as I imagined, presents the contrary evidence: eleven of his choices (two, three, four, and five words’ sequences) are the same made by Google: “*Em algumas [...], em outras [...], junto com o [...], que o homem [...], longa jornada, o que é [...], diante da [...], de muitos [...], tipo de morte [...], o espírito [...]. Muitos anos. Em outras [...], o espírito [...]*” (Bierce, trans. Reis, 2010, p. 65). Far from proving anything, the number of similar vocabulary and sentence structures (and the way they seem to be arranged within this selection) is not enough for one to assume plagiarism has occurred – in what regards the three of us. However, this is not at all what has most drawn my attention, but the number of words that each version of this “same” excerpt has. It is true that, usually, Portuguese translations tend to generate longer texts than originals in English (as a matter of fact every translation is bound to be longer than its original); the difference is nonetheless mountainous. Mine has 155 words; Reis’ translation 127; and Bierce’s original 121 – a probable result of my creative infidelity: the fact that, in my retranslation, I invented words and sentences that had never been in the original text. Reis has added six more words to the text: mine, in turn, is almost 30 words larger. The first sentence of the story provides us with a good example. My translation of “for there be divers sorts of death – some wherein the body remaineth; and in some it vanisheth quite away with the spirit” (Bierce, p. 22) has a complement that did not exist in the original when I pose that the body remains in the physical world. As it happens in the other moments when information is added, I did so to empower Bierce’s metaphysical problematisation of the dichotomy natural/supernatural, totally based on my own reading and interpretation.

I do not wish to be understood by all my readers, neither am I worried about those who might disagree with my unfaithful and unorthodox choices. I have assimilated and recreated Bierce’s text based on my reading, and I am proud of the decisions I made, regardless of how questionable they might be to those who are unwilling to expand the frontiers of translation practice (for those who might be eager to condemn me I do enjoy a fight, after all). As Leone puts it, “one does

not translate a text in its nascent state of original publication but in the context in which the translator currently exists, which includes the trajectory of the original up to that very point” (43). In this sense, regardless of how pertinent and stimulating it might be to become acquainted with as many features as possible in what concerns the original context, it is the locale wherein I personally find myself that exerts direct influence on my task. The conditions whereby I translate, my unique understanding of the text, and the audience whereto my recreation is directed shape my translation choices – which, during the process, also shape my future choices for translating other texts and excerpts. It is a dual enterprise: writers construct texts, texts respond by shaping back their writers. Consciously or unconsciously, and notwithstanding what I might allege, as a translator I am an agent who is moulded alongside my historical setting (and not the one of the original or of previous translations). If it is true that even though many artists might produce ground-breaking discourses that are capable of making a great difference here and there, what really matters in epistemological terms is the fact that before such discourses were conceived there had been many others. The concept of creative infidelity – one that gives translators the autonomy to be unfaithful as long as such infidelity lives up to the creativity their text requires – fits perfectly in my attempt at giving “An Inhabitant of Carcosa” an opportunity to keep breathing in my target context. Without obsolescence, there would not be novelty; and, in coherence with Borges’ idea of creative infidelity, I have used Bierce’s original as a draft for reinventing my version of the story he has told his former readers – the next excerpt consists in another evidence of my boldness (or recklessness, depending on who my reader might be).

Meus passos, decididos, seguiram na direção *na direção da qual o homem vinha e, quando já estávamos frente a frente, cumprimentei-o* como me era de costume: – Olá, como vai? Cumprimento esse para o qual ele não deu a menor atenção, nem mesmo fez menção de que estaria disposto a retardar o seu caminhar. Tentando acompanhá-lo, continuei: – Gentil cavalheiro, eu estou enfermo e desorientado; por isso imploro ao senhor que me indique para que lado está a cidade de Carcosa e como posso chegar lá. Quando terminei a frase, o estranho pôs-se *a entoar um canto bárbaro* em um idioma irreconhecível, para então seguir seu caminho. (Bierce, trans. Gonçalves, 2015, p. 7)

This excerpt of my translation encapsulates only four lines of the original – I am talking about 61 words of the text in English being turned into 105 in my Brazilian Portuguese retranslation. Again, Reis’ translation to European Portuguese is a little bit longer than Bierce’s text: 65 words, nothing compared to my own and, again, my text is closer to Reis’ translation. Three sequences that are repeated in both translation and retranslation, as emphasised in the previous excerpt, which are of, respectively, six, four, and five words – and I admit that here some plagiarism might have happened, as I may have unconsciously emulated some of Reis’ solutions such as “*entoar um canto bárbaro*”. When my retranslation is compared to Bierce’s, no structural resemblance can be pinpointed and, as it

happened before, this is not the case of Reis’ translation, which does present six passages equal to those of Bierce’s text translated by Google. These are sequences of two, three and four words: “*com a saudação [...], atenção, nem [...], doente e [...], para Carcosa. O homem [...], entoar um canto [...], língua desconhecida*” (Bierce, trans. Reis, 2010, p. 69). Moreover, one of my greatest changes in this excerpt concerns an even more debateable habit of mine when translating, which is to modulate, replace, or even get rid of moments when religious references are made in the original. As an atheist, I dream of a world without God, and I try to make such world possible also through my texts and translations. When he meets the stranger, the narrator’s story goes as follows: “Taking course to intercept him I met him almost face to face, accosting him with the familiar salutation, ‘God keep you.’ He gave no heed, nor did he arrest his pace” (Bierce, p. 24). Here, instead of translating “God keep you” to something like “*Deus esteja com você*”, as Reis (69) has done, or to something a little bit different such as “*Deus te abençoe*” – which is more common in Brazilian Portuguese, and would not be that distant from the original semantic field – I decided to exchange the narrator’s familiar salutation to “*Olá, como vai?*” Conscious that such choice affects not only the narration but also the character himself, I have only to be coherent with my personal agenda to eliminate (as much as possible) literary references to God, Jesus, and etc. that I occasionally happen to work with, but also to play with a more popular reference that would be born between Bierce’s story and the contemporary Brazilian context. When he launched the song “*Sinal Fechado*” (1970), the Brazilian musician Paulinho da Viola could never have imagined that the opening verses of the lyrics – “*Olá, como vai? Eu vou indo e você, tudo bem?*” – would not be forgotten by generations to come; and I relied on such imaginary to recreate Bierce’s usage of a common greeting into something a little bit different, but that, besides serving me well, eliminates the religious character of the original.

The point whereto I wanted to get with this discussion regarding creation versus translation is, I hope, quite clear now: artistic autonomy depends on the autonomy given to the author – and such autonomy is, at least as I see it, shared with the respective translators of their work to a considerable extent. Literary productions (original, translated, or retranslated) depend on previous drafts and are, as a result, amenable to become drafts as well. For some it may seem to be rather clear and cliché to say creativity is something inherent to the process of translation – by now I am pretty sure such an assertion consists of a common ground for those who scrutinise the intricate procedures implicated by literary textualisations and retextualisations. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the unquestionable growth of studies that put translation and retranslation in the spotlight, compelling researchers to devote to such field the attention it demands and deserves, members of academia do not yet agree about the extent of sovereignty represented by the translated text and manifested by those who translate it. I myself deem my task an “original” construction – and that does not mean at all I am endorsing any sort of disregard towards Bierce’s work; on the contrary, my liberty is motivated by the intention and need to generate a

text capable of living up to my expectations. I say *my* expectations 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 to as my version is shaped. Leone argues that he has always deemed the “translator someone who may use the information an original text provides creatively, constructing a text that adheres to the original to the degree she or he sees aesthetically necessary” (2011 p.44). 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.

Final remarks: Migrating from Carcosa

There is no universal rule compelling a text to be more or less “faithful” to the source language and author – what determines translators’ choices are subjective, impalpable and, more importantly, irrepressible. This is not, however, to say that translations are reckless activities – they simply depend on personal (however contaminated) interpretation. Nevertheless, no personal choice is devoid of external influences; and, as we have seen, when it pertains to retranslation such influences might get even more consistent. Borges proves to be pivotal for the conclusion of my research as his “approach to literature legitimizes translation as a valuable art form, a creative process that delegitimizes the notion of definitive texts, perfect ensembles of symbols upon which no variation, could be made” (Leone, 2011 p.179). That is, in a nutshell, basically what Borges seems to allege in his *sui generis* reflections and discussions within the realm of translation studies – and it is one that no researcher should disregard, no matter to what degree this or other views endorse or question his positioning. Of course a more thorough analysis on retranslated pieces, and other sorts of surveys concerning the comparison of translations of the same text done by different people, are of paramount importance for us to get to more palpable conclusions. In this case, the purpose of my translation project was “simply” to recreate a canonical and influential short story written more than a century ago. For such project to be undertaken, I chose to understand the literary discourse as an inconclusive art form amenable to suffer variation. Variation is not simply possible, it is inevitable – texts are not formed only by what words say; it is also what surrounds these words that takes part in communication. The discursive strength of translation, therefore, resides in the troposphere of meaning, under and above what is written on the surface of a text. Literature is an effect, and, as an effect, it goes beyond meaning, beyond what is written and beyond what the written words might once have meant.

For every literary translation requires a sort of creation, autonomy, and inspiration that is rather obviously (at least to me) in the artistic realm – and it is unlikely that an author would be encapsulated within such solid frontiers during his/her original textual manufacturing as the translator and re-translator generally is. Therefore, and rather aware that there are no definitive texts, I finish

this study by posing my idea of translation as a task that invites criticism to materialise, and as the production of one specific reading of a text that shall never be reached again. Texts as we read them only exist within our heads – no one reads them in the same fashion (not even ourselves, when we reread things we had read previously). Literature is in itself more analogous to lack of control than to control – it is what escapes consciousness that touches us more strongly in our reading – and translation operates likewise. Translation and retranslation are about moving, changing, reducing, expanding, etc. (as well-known by Berman devotees); and looking at how words, their order, meanings, and positions are changed is interesting, but sometimes might sound as an obsession – well, it is an obsession. These processes exist and are inevitable to the literary experience – but it simply *does not matter*. The pure original is not “lost”, it has actually never been there; on the palimpsest of literature, original or translated, there are only replaceable simulacra, marked by the fact that meanings are both gained and lost at the very same time. Apropos, perhaps it is high time we stopped looking at translation as an attempt at “not losing so much”, an attempt at transforming “but not so much”, an attempt at surviving comparisons. Comparison (when motivated by equivocated notions of fidelity) is hopeless inasmuch as both images compared are an invention, they only exist in our mental conception of them. Discussing “how a text should be translated” is equivalent to discussing which God is the real one (the former and the latter interrogations are never answered through reason; they are much more likely to depend on the contexts). It is clear to me that the task of the translator and re-translator is more to create than to maintain or reiterate; and translating is exerting our inexorable autonomy to produce the text we desire – based on our convictions. Bierce’s text has been my palimpsest, and my translation an original draft of it.

Notes

1. “*WCopyfind* consists in an open source windows-based program that compares documents and reports similarities in their words and phrases. The software is free of charge and available to any person and/or company. It is licensed under the Gnu Public License – which basically means that you can use it for any purposes, as long as you refrain from selling it. Downloadable from: <http://plagiarism.bloomfieldmedia.com/wordpress/software/wcopyfind/>
2. It is worth mentioning herein the case of Gabriel García Márquez’ *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, originally written in 1967. This is so for, given the Colombian writer’s allegations, this, which is a world-widely canonised piece, provides us with an example of the very opposite – an inversion of this pre-established step-by-step. García Márquez “remarked that he prefer[red] the English to the Spanish version”, posing that his original was actually unfaithful to the translation carried out by Gregory Rabassa – and published in the United States in 1970. To see more on this check: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/mar/08/thegreatnessofgabrielgarci>
3. Of course sometimes this “petulance” is rather liable to be put into question, especially taking into account that I am grappling in this study with the issue of plagiarism. I am not oblivious to the fact that this might sound contrary to the central argument of my research – my point nonetheless is that one cannot be far

too romantic when dealing with the freedom to re-create, as if such freedom was available to every subject (which is far from being the case). Let us not forget that the literary market is one that involves a consistent amount of money, and that ends up privileging writers from more hegemonic spaces and marginalising those who occupy peripheral literary positions. As such, when the issue of “re-creation freedom” is evoked, it inevitably tends to work better for the former than for the latter. One example that comes to mind is Yann Martel’s novel *Life of Pi*, written in 2001, whose narrative includes an overt plagiarism to Moacyr Scliar’s *Max and the cats*, originally published in 1981 and translated into English by Eloah F. Giacomelli in 1990. Regardless of these books’ similarity, Scliar’s one was never given as much attention and publicity as Martel’s – which, as a result, received the Pulitzer prize (among others) and was adapted to an Oscar winning film in 2012. I bring this example as it fits like a glove for us to see how the freedom to re-create has, in many occasions, much to do with power relations (between the source of inspiration and the object it has inspired). I dare say that, in literary terms, Scliar’s novella, discussing political and existential issues inherent to our human condition, is much superior to Martel’s bestseller. The plot of *Life of Pi*, in my view, only brings sand to the beach – hence my suspicion that the novel did not become more successful simply for its “quality”. Of course Martel thinks differently, alleging that he has “improved” Scliar’s work, who supposedly had had a good idea, but not enough ability to develop it as he should. The issue of plagiarism, it seems, is not only about improving the quality of a work – it might also serve as a means for one to assert who has the power to create and who is amenable to be forgotten. Both *Max and the cats* and *Life of Pi* are potentially capable of enthraling their readers – who are free to prefer one or the other, of course, from their subjective and particular readings. Nevertheless, in the literary market arena, as the former is Brazilian and the latter Canadian their prospects were never comparable – from the moment they were written. When one thinks of plagiarism it might be said, therefore, that all copyists are equal, but some copyists are more equal than others (just to paraphrase George Orwell, who would probably say that if he heard Pink Floyd’s 1977 album *Animals*). For more on this discussion see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/08/bookerprize2002.awardsandprizes>

4. “*Une première traduction a toujours tendance à être plutôt assimilatrice, à réduire l’alterité au nom d’impératifs culturels, éditoriaux [...] La retraduction dans ce conditions consisterait en un retour au texte-source*” (414).
5. “*Em um sentido mais amplo, o escritor [Borges] mostra como a tradução enquanto leitura desviada, como indistinção entre leitura e ficção ou entre citações verdadeiras e apócrifas pode proporcionar um terreno privilegiado, onde os escritores periféricos podem inovar, definir suas literaturas e remodelá-las.*”

References

- Bierce, Ambrose. 1886. An Inhabitant of Carcosa. *Can such Things be? An Inhabitant of Carcosa and Other Stories*. London: Routledge, 2014
- _____. 1886. Um Habitante de Carcosa. *Os Contos Completos de Ambrose Bierce*. Trans. João Reis. Vila Nova de Gaia: Eucleia Editora, 2010.
- _____. 1886. Carcosa. *Sombras de Carcosa: Contos de Terror Cósmico*. Org. Cynthia Beatrice Costa e Juliana Lopes Bernardino. Trans. Davi Silva Gonçalves. São Paulo: Poetisa, 2015.
- _____. 1891. *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians: and Other Stories*. London: Penguin Classics, 2000.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. 1965. *Fictions*. Trans. Anthony Kerrigan. London: John Calder, 1966.

- _____. *A Personal Anthology*. Trans. Anthony Kerrigan. New York: Groce, 1967.
- _____. *Obra Poética*. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1969.
- _____. "Los traductores de las 1001 Noches." *Obras Completas*. Argentina: Emecé, 1974. 406-410.
- _____. 1970. *Labyrinths*. Trans. Donald Yates. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979.
- _____. 1971. *The Aleph and Other Stories*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. London: Cape, 1982.
- _____. 1973. *Other Inquisitions*. Trans. Ruth Simms. London: Souvenir Press, 1999.
- Chambers, E. K. 1951. *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Chambers, R. W. 1895. *The King in Yellow*. Colorado: Conundrum Classics, 2014.
- Coulthard, Malcolm. & Johnson, Alison. On textual borrowing. *An Introduction to Forensic Linguistics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 184-199.
- _____. , Kredens, Krzysztof & Woolls, David. Four forensic Linguists' responses to suspected plagiarism. *Handbook of Forensic Linguistics*. London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 523-538.
- Floyd, Pink. *Animals*. London : Harvest Records, 1977.
- Gambier, Yves. La Retraduction, retour et détour. *Meta* 39.3 (1994): 421-425.
- Kristal, Efraín. *Invisible Work: Borges and Translation*. Tennessee: Vanderbilt UP, 2002.
- Leone, Elizabeth. "Displacing the mask: Jorge Luis Borges and the translation of narrative." PhD Thesis. University of Iowa, Iowa, 2011.
- Lovecraft, H. P. 1928. *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*. London: Del Rey, 1998.
- Márquez, Gabriel García. 1967. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Trans. Gregory Rabassa. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.
- Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2001.
- Orwell, George. *Animal farm*. London: Secker and Warburg, 1945.
- Paula, Marcelo Bueno. "Borges e As mil e uma Noites: Leitura, Tradução e Criação." PhD Thesis. UFSC, Florianópolis, 2011.
- Scliar, Moacyr. 1981. *Max and the cats*. Trans. Eloah F. Giacomelli. New York: Plume, 1990.
- Sousa-Silva, Rui. Detecting translingual plagiarism and the backlash against translation plagiarists. *Language and Law / Linguagem e Direito*, 1.1 (2014): 70-94.
- Viola, Paulinho. *Sinal fechado. Foi um rio que passou em minha vida*. São Paulo: EMI Music Brasil, 1970.

Recebido em: 15/08/2018

Aceito em: 13/03/2019