

“My dear Stevie, from Nonno”: Translations and Illustrations of a Joycean Verbal Text for Young Readers

“Meu querido Stevie, do Nonno”: Traduções e ilustrações de um texto verbal joyceano para jovens leitores

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Abstract: *James Joyce (1882-1941) was one of the most revolutionary and influential modernist writers, both inside and outside anglophone literature. Notably, the author did not write for children, but a letter sent to his grandson, Stephen James Joyce (1932-2020), published for the first time in 1957, was entitled The Cat and the Devil and released as a children’s book. The translations of this letter into more than twenty languages over the last 60 years, bring about themes and elements of Joycean writing, while revealing themselves as products of their own time and society. From this perspective, this article seeks to analyse the illustrations and translations of The Cat and the Devil from the perspective of intersemiotic reading by young readers. The results point to the translations of the work as transitions between semiotic systems, in creative and interpretative acts of appropriation and redemption by both the translator and the illustrator. The semiotic/semantic potential present in the multimodality of the picture book was evidenced in terms of the possibilities for exploring and engaging young readers, expanding the single addressee of the original letter and transforming it into a significant work of children’s literature.*

Keywords: *James Joyce; The Cat and the Devil; Translation; Illustration; Intersemiotic Reading.*

Resumo: *James Joyce (1882-1941) foi um dos mais revolucionários e influentes escritores modernistas, dentro e fora da literatura anglófona. Notoriamente, o autor não escreveu para crianças, mas uma carta enviada a seu neto, Stephen James Joyce (1932-2020), e publicada pela primeira vez em 1957, foi intitulada The Cat and the Devil e lançada como livro infantojuvenil. As traduções desta carta, realizadas em mais de vinte idiomas ao longo dos últimos 60 anos, trazem*

temas e elementos da escrita joyciana para adultos, ao mesmo tempo que se revelam como produtos de seu próprio tempo e da sociedade em que se inserem. Partindo desta perspectiva, este trabalho buscou analisar o percurso de ilustrações e traduções da obra The Cat and the Devil/O Gato e o Diabo, sob o viés da leitura intersemiótica de jovens leitores. Os apontam para as traduções da obra como transições entre sistemas semióticos em atos criativos e interpretativos de apropriação e resgate tanto do tradutor quanto do ilustrador. Evidenciou-se o potencial semiótico/semântico presente na multimodalidade do livro ilustrado quanto às possibilidades de exploração e engajamento dos jovens leitores, extrapolando o destinatário único da carta original transformando-a em uma significativa obra da literatura infantojuvenil.

Palavras-chave: James Joyce; The Cat and the Devil; Tradução; Ilustração; Leitura intersemiótica.

James Augustine Aloysius Joyce (1882-1941) was one of the most acclaimed and influential writers of modernist literature. Joyce was born in Dublin, Ireland, on 2 February, 1882. His first short stories were published in 1904. Some of most remarkable works are the short story collection *Dubliners* (1914), the play *Exiles* (1918), the poetry collections *Chamber Music* (1907) and *Pomes Penyeach* (1927), and the novels *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939).

Living most of his life as an expatriate, Joyce returned to Ireland only a few times, and his last visit was in 1912. A few years later, established as a well-known author, Joyce dealt with personal and health problems. In addition to issues of plagiarism and censorship to *Ulysses*, his father, John Stanislaus Joyce (1849-1931), died in December 1931, followed by the declining mental health of his daughter Lucia Joyce (1907-1982). The loss was alleviated by the birth of his grandson Stephen James Joyce (1932-2020), son of Giorgio Joyce (1905-1976), in February 1932. James Joyce died on 13 January 1941, at the age of 58, in Zurich, where he was buried. No official representative of the Irish state attended his funeral.

Notably, James Joyce did not write for children. However, the author was very fond of the conversations and stories he told his only grandson, Stephen James Joyce. Helen Kastor Fleischman (1894-1963), Stephen's mother, reported in her memoirs that:

As Stevie grew older I loved to watch him crawling onto his grandfather's knee and asking him grave little questions. His serious childish face was charming to see as he listened to the slow and painstaking answers that [his grandfather] gave him in his slow careful Dublin drawl. [Joyce] was infinitely patient with him and was always willing to stop and talk to him or to answer as he grew older his incessant 'whys.' The answers needless to say were always wonderful ones. (Max, 2006)

On 10 August 1936, during a vacation trip to Villers-sur-Mer, France, Joyce wrote a letter to four-year-old Stephen, telling him one of the stories he cherished so much - about the cat of Beaugency. Although Janet E. Lewis (1992) claims that there is no concrete evidence that Joyce visited Beaugency on this occasion – except for a photo of his wife Nora Barnacle (1884-1951) with friends –, Amanda Sigler (2008) validates the facts and confirms that, based on a letter sent to his son Giorgio from a hotel in Beaugency, Joyce was in the French town days before writing the letter that would become a picture book named *The Cat and the Devil*. As Sigler (2008) points out, the letter also indicates that Joyce wrote the story based on personal associations rather than distant sources. Considering the proximity of the dates, the story should have been fresh in Joyce's mind when it was written, which suggests that the narrative incorporated, in addition to the folklore tradition, his recent travel experiences.

Years later, when James Joyce's correspondence were compiled and studies on them were made, the story told and sent to Stephen gained prominence. It was published in its original format for the first time in 1957, in the book *Letters of James Joyce*, edited by Stuart Gilbert. Given the semiotic potential of the text, the letter was given a title, *The Cat and the Devil*, and was first published as a picture book for children in 1964 in the United States, followed by an edition in England the following year. Besides the addition of illustrations and pagination, the structure of the epistolary genre was maintained, along with its original textual elements: date, greeting, text addressed to the recipient, salutation and signature.

At a first glance, it is possible to see that the narratives produced by Joyce for an adult audience have much in common with the text of *The Cat and the Devil*: the use of “a mixture of languages (the narrator of the story speaks English; the Devil speaks French, with a Dublin accent), invented words and historical and biographical allusions, as well as returning to the Irish question through, for example, the naive figure of the Devil”¹ (Amarante 17). Alessandra Rech adds that the story of the cat of Beaugency elicits recurring themes in Joyce's work, “such as the figure of the expatriate, who in this case is the Devil himself, as well as political criticism”²

(155). Black (2013) points out that, like Dublin, Beaugency is situated on a vast, wide river, it is proud of its stone bridge and has witnessed many conflicts with English invaders. The author suggests that, during his visit to the city, Joyce read up on its history.

The Cat and the Devil is relevant in comparison with works of literature aimed at young adults because it has intertextual relationships with myths, legends and ballads. Joyce transformed a popular ballad into a literary fairy tale, with a subversive ending for young readers – from tragic to comic, full of new meanings, allusions, quotations, themes and stylizations – considering that fairy tales can be characterized as text for children, and context for adults.

In Joyce's story, the legend of Beaugency describes the construction of the bridge over the River Loire. It features a mayor called Monsieur Alfred Byrne (following the name of the Lord Mayor of Dublin at that time). The French title "monsieur" indicates that such a typical Irish name must be misplaced; moreover, the mayor – in lower case – is ridiculed for his strange habits and his taste for pomp. Even the cat shows no interest in his figure.

Similarly to his parallel character, the devil is domesticated: unlike his historical and peculiar otherness, in this tale he is anthropomorphized. He reads the newspaper and uses a telescope; he becomes identifiable with the present and, consequently, with the reader. The people of Beaugency align themselves with the Irish, in a critique of their cowardice and cunning in sacrificing someone to cheat a sympathetic devil (Barai, 2018). The letter itself is a bridge to foreignness, the same way the cat can be considered a bridge to other cultures (Barai, 2014), as a common and popular element frequently found in tales and traditions.

It could be inferred that Joyce wrote to a double addressee, an external one - his grandson Stephen - and an internal one – an adult –, due to the presence of a number of intertextual elements that are readily understood by more experienced readers from the perspective of literary reception, such as stereotypes, humor, irony and criticism. While directly addressing his grandson, the recipient of the letter, Joyce translates the inner monologue of a literary character – the devil talking to the cat in French.

The author's positive relationship with cats is evident in his correspondence with his grandson Stephen. Among the records of letters and postcards sent by Joyce, there is an illustrated postcard with an image of Puss in Boots, sent on Stephen's birthday in 1934. The letter to his grandson opens with "My dear Stevie, I sent you a little cat filled with sweets a few days ago but perhaps you do not know the story about the cat of Beaugency" (Joyce, 2021 2), again demonstrating affection for the animal through a gift and a motif for the story told.

Siegler (2008) adds that Joyce continued to think about cats even after finishing the story and sending it to his grandson. About a month later, in September 1936, when Joyce was in Copenhagen, he wrote another letter to Stephen telling him that, unfortunately, he could not send his grandson a cat as there were no such felines in that city – a letter that gave rise to Joyce’s second children’s book, *The Cats of Copenhagen*, published for the first time in 2012 in its original language (English), in a limited edition of 200 copies by Ithys Press, with illustrations by Casey Sorrow and typography by Michael Caine. The first translation into Brazilian Portuguese was published in 2013 by Editora Iluminuras, translated by Dirce Waltrick do Amarante and illustrated by Michaella Pivetti.

Filled with many references, associations and metaphors, the connection between the cat and the devil strangely awakens a pattern of closeness between father and son, or grandfather and grandson. Joyce demonstrates a peculiar and expressive trait, using literary and linguistic devices to contemplate the social and political ideology he believes in, as well as mirroring his own experiences. The letter he wrote to his grandson Stephen, although personal, bears these traits and has become another example of literature that favours different points of view and multiple interpretations as each meaning is revealed.

When converted from letter into picture book, the text suffers few modifications. Basically, the paragraphing is modified in the picture book editions, since the epistle is broken up into separate pages. Joyce did not translate the French text, which is the devil’s speech in French “with a strong Dublin accent”. In the original publication of the letter, from 1957, the word “devil” begins with a capital letter at its first mention, and is then spelled in lowercase. The illustrated books in English, on the other hand, bring “devil” in upper or lower case at the editor’s discretion. “Lord Mayor”, conversely, is always spelled in lower case in the original. The publications also keep the letter signed by “Nonno”, in Italian.

The process of intersemiotic translation becomes evident in the picture book editions. Illustrations play an important role in children’s reading. Images, both in their pedagogical and ludic components (and especially in the former), allow children to acquire new concepts. Even if reading is difficult and laborious, images help readers understand and stimulate their imagination; they arouse the child’s interest in the content. Obviously, the text must maintain coherence between visual and non-visual elements. Peter Hunt states that “words can augment, contradict, expand, echo or interpret images – and vice versa”³ (165). The semiotic/semantic

potential present in the multimodality of a picture book fosters the possibilities of reading exploration – and this is not exclusive to children and adolescents.

An attentive reading of the illustrators' choices by the adult reader brings new elements to be discovered. The first picture book edition was published by Dodd, Mead & Company in New York (USA) and illustrated by Richard Erdoes, an American photographer, author and illustrator. His illustrations follow a neo-medieval style, more faithful to the Beaugency legend, depicting a partially humanized devil, with horns, pointed ears, one human foot and another animal foot, more neutral colours and a countenance that certainly populated the imagination of that figure at the time. In contrast, Beaugency's illustrations were more colourful, and the children depicted would refer to a classic work for children in the 1960s: *Madeline*, by Ludwig Bemelmans.

In the following year, 1965, the first British edition was published in London by Faber & Faber, with illustrations by award-winning British artist Gerald Rose. Mixing colour and black-and-white images with an increased level of detail, the great innovation of this edition was a more humanized devil – still with horns, tail and trident – portraying James Joyce himself. Presented in a mirror, there is an emphasis on representation and recognition, evoking that the devil is the author himself. The visual allusions make the text ambivalent, serving children and adults simultaneously in two literary systems.

Since its first publication, *The Cat and the Devil* has been translated into more than 20 languages. In 1966, the first translated edition of the picture book was published in France, by Jacques Borel, with illustrations by Jean-Jacques Corre. The art is illustrated in black and white, with double-page spread text and a devil who is deliberately the physical representation of the author James Joyce. Critics generally define Corre's illustrations and layout as difficult to read but visually beautiful, in a modernist style associated with medieval and cartoonish illustrations. Considering that the original text is partly written in French, we may think about the processes of domestication and foreignization. In the editions translated into French, the text originally in French remains in French, with an explanatory note – clearly a missed opportunity to recreate the sense of otherness and foreignization established by Joyce in his letter.

Twenty years after Borel's translation, Stephen James Joyce published a “new translation” into French with his wife, Solange Joyce. Stephen Joyce's edition claims to be completely different from the previous one, but in general it follows Jacques Borel's choices at

several key points in the text. It can therefore be inferred that Stephen and Solange's displeasure may not be seen as a question of the lexicon, but probably due to Corre's illustrations. Hence, in addition to a new translation, the 1985 edition in French features Roger Blachon's illustrations, first published in 1978. Stephen James Joyce himself, who for many years, until the end of his life in 2020, was responsible for his grandfather's estate – a staunch protector of Joyce's legacy, known for his inflexibility in allowing scholars to use his grandfather's works –, wrote an afterword in 1990 (used in some editions as a preface) in the form of a letter, in which he addresses the young reader and puts the author and work into context.

The implicit information present in each illustration and the brevity of the letter lead it to an illustrated record in a very natural way (Sezzi, 2017), hence the images that accompany the text can increase but also complicate the possibilities of interpretation (Siegler, 2008). The translation of picture books into other languages can suffer from damaging disparities between text and image, especially when specific cultural elements are removed (Barai, 2018).

It is also worth remembering that translations and illustrations of *The Cat and the Devil* have been published from the 1960s to the present day, and each of them follows very specific children's visual symbolism, according to the society in which they are inserted, which changes according to time and place (Sezzi, 2017). As there is a considerable number of illustrators who have dedicated themselves to transposing Joyce's letter into images, we have chosen to comment on two illustration projects that stand out: that of aforementioned Frenchman Roger Blachon, and that of Brazilian Marcelo Lelis.

Roger Blachon's illustrations, which appeared in 1978 in the second French edition of *Le Chat et le Diable*, became so popular that they were used in translations in several other languages – including the original edition in English of 1981, published by Schocken Books. Blachon establishes distance and difference in an association between Ireland and France, bringing up the theme of Catholicism, consistently present in Joyce's work. Returning to medieval aesthetics, the mayor resembles the pope and the villagers are dressed in medieval style. A childish devil wearing red and a white cat complete the story's main characters.

With James Joyce's work entering the public domain in 2012, there have been a large number of new publications over the last ten years. *The Cat and the Devil* has gained a few new editions in Brazil, one of them by Cosac Naify, translated by Lygia Bojunga and illustrated by Marcelo Lelis, an award-winning artist from Minas Gerais. Lelis's watercolor art features a humanized devil, taking up the canon established in the illustrations of the story with traces

of Joyce's appearance. The close-up framing is observed, bringing the reader's perspective closer, in contrast to panoramic views, but always from an angle in which the reader is close, almost inside the scene, with the point of view of the narrator's eyes. Lelis's illustrations gained prominence and were used again in 2021 in a new Brazilian edition, by Abacatte Editorial with a new translation by Leo Cunha, and in an original edition in English published in Ireland by Little Island Books.

Faced with so many peculiar elements, the translators of the story into their respective languages also encounter challenges in the process of creating the text, balancing the translation and adaptation of the story. Amarante states that "translating and adapting, in the context of children and adolescents, are terms that go hand in hand, since they transform the text into what we understand, or can understand"⁴(23). Research on *The Cat and the Devil* translations points out that the mayor's name and his domesticated characteristics have been retained, even though foreign names are not common in children's books. The city of Beaugency and the implicit criticism of Dublin also remain in the translations (Barai, p. 2014). Another element that remains is the letter opening elements, with the date, place and addressee. The presence of so many original items suggests the authority exercised by Joyce over his writings to this day.

Barai (2014, p. 185) presents the French translator's challenge in rendering the text into one of the languages of origin in the story, especially in matters of domestication and foreignization of the content: "Borel's translation makes strange what would naturally be domestic, were it a French story: Borel italicizes the French dialogue that Joyce has in the original text, and he adds a footnote". Blachon's illustrations, the author points out, also encourage the young reader to learn about a foreign culture, moving towards a more international perspective – which is also an aspect of modernism (Barai, 2014).

As Klamt concludes, "*The Cat and the Devil* is a letter that, as it leaves the envelope, unfolds, unfolds and unfolds"⁵ (225).

Notes

¹ "mescla de línguas (o narrador da história fala inglês; já o diabo fala francês, com sotaque dublinense), de palavras inventadas e de alusões históricas e biográficas, além de retomar a questão irlandesa por meio, por exemplo, da figura ingênua do diabo" (Amarante 17, my translation).

² "como a figura do expatriado, que nesse caso é o próprio Diabo, bem como a crítica política" (Rech 155, my translation).

- ³ “as palavras podem aumentar, contradizer, expandir, ecoar ou interpretar as imagens – e vice-versa” (Hunt 165, my translation).
- ⁴ “traduzir e adaptar, no contexto infanto-juvenil, são termos que caminham lado a lado, uma vez que transformam o texto naquilo que compreendemos, ou que podemos compreender” (Amarante 23, my translation).
- ⁵ “*O Gato e o Diabo* é uma carta que ao sair do envelope se desdobra, desdobra e desdobra” (Klamt, 2016, p. 225, my translation).

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