

CHALLENGES OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION¹ (The Translational Adventures of Askeladden)

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ABSTRACT: Language is a structural as well as a cultural and an individual phenomenon. So is all and every manifestation of language in discourse, including the discourse acknowledged as translation. Thus, all and any translation, and not only translations of literary texts, face the problem of translating culture, and cannot be reduced to a mere transcoding of lexis and grammar. But the structural, the cultural and the individual planes of language are different in nature, and their coexistence is marked by tension, conflict and unbalance. This fact, in turn, renders translation, including the translation of cultural elements, relatively feasible, and opens up for three main approaches: **source-centered** translation, **target-centered** translation and **translator-centered** (or **creative**) translation, as exemplified in the translation into Brazilian Portuguese of tales from the Norwegian folklore. It is suggested that a translation which desires to achieve a polyphonic effect, i.e., which strives to avoid silencing the otherness, either of the source or of the target language, will often require the deliberate intervention of the creative approach.

KEY-WORDS: Translation; source-centered translation; target-centered translation; creative translation; culture; Norwegian folklore.

Every translational operation which is not limited to a mere transcoding of lexis and syntax involves, to a greater or lesser degree, a set of cultural components. Every translational operation which imagines itself limited to a mere transcoding of lexis and grammar (as is the case of the so-called

“automatic” or “computer-assisted” translation) will, in any case, generate texts and discourses which will be read and interpreted by its recipients as containing one or more cultural components, despite the filtering which may have been committed, intentionally or otherwise. The translation cul-

1 This text was originally presented by the Author as a lecture under the examination for the post of Professor in Translation Studies, Department of Modern Languages, Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences, University of São Paulo, in May, 1994. Re-written from the original Portuguese by the Author.

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ture correlation is thus no secondary aspect, something which may occur but not necessarily so, is no exclusive privilege of the translation of literature and similar text typologies, but, indeed, covers and encompasses all translational acts indistinctly, even if in varying degrees of intensity.

Evidently enough, the translational act is a linguistic act. Equally evident is the fact that it is not only a linguistic act, since it may equally be taken as an object for anthropological, sociological, psychological, communicative, ideological, neurological, commercial and legal thought and usage. But it will always, over and above being an anthropological, social, psychological, ... fact, and, indeed, for this very reason, be an act of language and of speech. Indeed, if translation takes on this number of different guises, it does so precisely because it is an act of language. The kaleidoscopic reality, the multitude of correlations and intersections of the psychosocial, the anthropological, the discursive, the neurologic, etc., are not specific and exclusive of the translational act but of all and any act of language, herein including translation.

Under any theorizing or pragmatic perspective, deductive or inductive, in the eyes of science or in the empirical experience of everyday life of its users, every language appears as a privileged vehicle of expression, as an instrument unmeasurably bountiful — albeit far from omnipotent — of thinking about, of speaking of, of making and of acting on the world, on society, on the collective and individual experience. And language, beyond this, appears as a constituent of the most intimate nature of the human being — even if not exclusively of the human being —, inserted in history and in every instant of this history and of the collective and individual life paths. It is instrumentalized as an essential means for self-perception and for the perception of otherness, of the familiar and the foreign, for the confirming restatement of the known, for the exploration or denegation of the unknown or, alternatively, for what is often a painstaking negotiation between the supposedly known and the supposedly

unknown. Finally, language is the vehicle, the impulse and the most dynamic tool of the world of labor. And if in this characterization we are able to recognize an image, an "imitation" (in the Classical sense of the term) of a reality each and every one of us is familiar with, we will necessarily be lead to admit that each language and each discourse, each internal or externalized act of speech, whether literary, technical, commercial, scientific, ludic or merely futile in nature or intent, carries within itself cultural components and links, and is, in itself, a cultural fact.

Let us admit that transcoding, as a strictly linguistic, structural operation, would, *a priori*, seem possible and, not seldom, sufficient to ensure an elementary denotative interaction (even if with results which may be disappointing or deceptive from the point of view of idiomatism, fluency, "tone"). Let us, on the other hand, admit that a complete translational act involves not only lexis and grammar² but the text as a whole, which text incorporates language as structure, language as an historical and social (i.e., cultural) phenomenon, and language as an act of speech, of discourse, being, simultaneously, an individual and a collective reality. Let us further admit, that every text also incorporates a certain expression or a certain conception of reality; and that linguistic — and, thus, also translational — operations refer to a multitude of extra-linguistic cultural elements. This being the case, up to what point is translation feasible without divesting, surrendering or masking precisely what lies beyond lexis and grammar, those components which extend from form to content and from content to the universes of representation of reality?

2 This comment does not intend to imply that the strictly linguistic (lexis, grammar) components of the translational act do not lend themselves to become specific objects of investigation. Indeed, much solid work in the field of translational studies is based on bilingual lexicography. In the same general direction the line of research conducted at this Faculty under the heading of "translation modalities".

And here we inevitably are forced to return to the most ancient, most often resumed and, in the opinion of some recent schools of thought, an outmoded query: although translations are undertaken and deemed completed, is such translational operation in fact feasible? Is there any sense in speaking of translatability? Is not the degree of entropy irremediably excessive? Do languages contain in their structures elements which are sufficient to overcome the apparent discrepancies, and which may be understood simply as "surface structure" problems, save for a few more intricate but exceptional cases? Or, on the contrary, are those creations of the human mind and skill to which we refer as *translations* to be understood as mere simulacra of an equivalence which yearns after an impossible identity, *Fata Morganas* which bear witness to the irreparable loss of a universal communion, this being the true original sin, committed under the glades of the tree of knowledge way before Babel, or arising from the sacrifice of Odin, when he paid with an eye the right to drink from the waters of wisdom which spout forth among the roots of Yggdrasil?

If one of the effects of the acquisition of knowledge was the loss of the original communion, a new communion will only be achieved through the use of knowledge itself. Thus, the seemingly obvious remark that, despite a multitude of theoretical objections, translation and translations are being wrought for centuries and millennia, a remark which will often be taken as suggesting the non-reality or lack of pertinence of the problem, would seem as being excessively simplistic, as a necessary but certainly insufficient evidence of a possible translatability. The pertinence of theorization, the relevance of a dilemma which, at least since the Pentateuch, has been perceived as a problem essential to Mankind, to Man's relation with his/her neighbor and with the transcendent, cannot therefore be denied. Nor, on the other hand, should translation's practitioners be brought to silence. If both, theoretician and practitioner, in their respec-

tive spheres of action, hold claim to some degree of reason, the goal ought to be to attempt at a harmonization of their respective voices, to give heed to their respective fears, to overcome dissonance not by silencing one or the other, but by achieving a polyphonic harmonization of such voices.

In order to attain such harmonization, it suffices not — since one would then fail to meet the requirements of the fundamental principle of the search for understanding, *viz. dubito ergo sum* — simply to infer from the preceding that truth is to be found somewhere in between the two extremes and immediately accept, without further consideration, that translatability is a matter of relativity. To asseverate that a certain modicum of translatability is manifest in reality and that the scope of such translatability is relative is to state the obvious. But, as often is the case, an obvious statement tends to conceal a number of different aspects of non-irrelevant and often not so obvious details, and which require investigation so to enable us to assess the actual extent of such relativity.

In a first and tentative incursion, the presupposition of truth with respect to a relative translatability leads us to the conviction that the opposition between the "optimistic" and "pessimistic" theories of translation — between those which, following the steps of Jakobson, believe that "languages differ only in what they *must* express but not in that which they *can* express" (1969), and those which, following the Humboldtian trend of thought (see, e.g. Mounin, 1963, Whorf, 1958) understand the language/culture bond as being so strong, so powerful and indissociate that it stands as an insurmountable barrier to any effective translation — stands in fact as a proposition of a false dilemma. Instead of an excludent *either/or* relationship, it would seem to be more productive to admit a *both/and* relation of complementarity, even though such relationship is not established without incorporating certain conflicts.

Conflict, in fact, is inherent to language and to culture — and, for that matter, to all things

pertaining to Man — and thus, also, to translation. As a structure, as an abstract system, any language is an articulated set of algebraic rules of form/meaning correspondence (Mel'chuck, 1978), and therefore contains within itself all potentialities, all virtualities of expressivity, and not only the expressions acknowledged by usage. And any analysis, however superficial, of such potentialities, reveals that common usage only seldom realizes more than 10 or 15% of what the system has to offer, opening up for an almost unlimited field for implementing innovation, for creation, for diachronic transformation.

As a psychosocial and historical phenomenon, however, every language is the result of the labors of dozens and hundreds of generations, it is the repository of a tradition — or of a set of several traditions — in which certain form/meaning correspondences appear as consolidated configurations which are immediately identifiable, marked and intermingled with the collective history of the community of speakers and with the individual history of each one of such speakers. Such configurations offer to each member of the pertinent community, an enhancement of his/her self-perception within the bosom of the collective and, at the same time, tend to generate a feeling of foreignness and a possible rejection of innovation and otherness. And it is as a result of this interaction, of this intertwining of virtuality with the historical, the spacial, the collective and the individual that each language assumes and acquires its specific features, ensures a degree of dynamism and mutability without, however, relinquishing its anchorhold on boundaries set by the times and by the spaces within which it unfolds itself; it is thus that language becomes the complex phenomenon we acknowledge it to be, the support for universal cognition and, concurrently, the bearer and form of expression of a given cultural complex.

But this structural and historical, collective and individual compound is, by its very nature, unstable. Unstable is the history of each community, of each sub-group within the larger commu-

nity, of each individual, with a certain "logic" which becomes visible *a posteriori* but is inaccessible to the sharpest of futurological predictions. Unstable is also the structure itself. In any synchronic analysis one may choose to carry out (an analysis which, although admittedly artificial, can be justified inasmuch as it offers a clearer view of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic networks which make up the system and define its virtualities), it is relatively easy to perceive "overloaded" points — e.g. the extensive gender and number agreement within the Noun Phrase in most Romance languages — and "missing links" — as the lack of morphological expression of progressivity in French. Finally, the interaction between the two planes, *system* and *usage* (in the sense defined by Hjelmslev, 1943), is the interaction between phenomena each of a very different nature, the first tending to non-temporality, the second closely bound to temporality and, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, the first vested with creative potentiality, the second the bulwark of a certain conservatism. Thus, the complex set of *structure* + *usage*, and which we collectively term *language*, is typified by a relative unstableness, by a permanent state of "be-coming", by an (un)stableness which ensures, concurrently albeit conflictingly, the social-discursive cohesion and individualization, and upholds conceptual permanence — e.g. retaining, for more than twenty-odd centuries, the very same basic concepts of Euclidean geometry — side by side with all the spacial and temporal fluctuations of discourses.

From the overall relative unstableness of language over collective and individual times and spaces, results, and contrary to the belief of the Neo-Humboldtian school of thought, a relative interpermeability of the language/culture complexes. In fact, the collective and individual (un)stableness allows room for creativity, renders possible the linguistic and cultural loan and *calque*, affords the multiplicity of interpretations, the multiplication of speeches. But, precisely because of its unstableness

within an apparent stability, such speeches share the limitations of all and any material, of any vehicle of human expression. Much as the painter or sculptor must engage in a battle between his/her artistic concept and the resistance of the material on which he/she carries out the work of art, and derives from this very conflict the actual expression of a subjective understanding of reality, by the same token the various languages and forms of speech offer, in so far as they are stable and unique, a varied resistance against the free scope of action of their authors.

In the specific case of interlingual translation, i.e., of translation between two language/cultures, such relative mutual permeability allows for three approaches, not necessarily mutually excludent, nor necessarily of a dissimilar nature but, rather, complementary: (i) the linguistic/cultural transfer of the original text into the translated text; (ii) the reordering of the original text within the target language/culture, in a form of *Nacherzählung*; and (iii) the appropriation of the text by the translator, undertaking the original/translation equivalence by means of the express mediation of the agent of the translational act. In other words, it allows for making a basic choice among *source-centered translation*, *target-centered translation* (these first two essentially equivalent to what Newmark, 1981, labeled as *semantic* and *communicative translation*) and *creative translation* proper.

In source-centered translation, the human operation closest to the transcoding of the automatic "translation" systems is carried out. Here, the forms of "direct" translation (see Vinay & Darbelnet, 1958, Vinay, 1964, Aubert, 1984) tend to predominate, with its loans, *calques* and literal (i.e., word-for-word) translations, besides transpositions and explicitations (appositions, footnotes and the like), corresponding to the morphosyntactic accommodations and the semantic-cultural elucidations. The focus and the referent of the entire operation is concentrated in the target text/language/culture, and the translated text will serve as a "transparency", a "reader's guide" to the original rather than

as an autonomous text. The most explicit illustration of this option is probably that known as a "sworn translation" (see also Aubert, 1993). In another variant, the solutions adopted by Odorico Mendes in his Hellenizing translations of Homer into Portuguese and, indeed, practically any and every bilingual edition of any text, whether literary or otherwise, will also essentially adopt the source-centered approach. Here, the fact that the text so produced is a translated text, strictly linked to the original, is not concealed; on the contrary, one will render or attempt to render such linkage, such explicit approximation, the essential merit of the completed task.

In target-centered translation, the viewpoint is reversed. The goal will now be to achieve a thorough substitution of the linguistic-cultural components of the source text, to be replaced by linguistic-cultural constituents clearly identified with the receptive space of the translated text. The result will tend to generate in the recipient an illusion of a text originally composed in the target language/culture. Here, the tools of oblique translation, i.e., transposition, modulation and adaptation will acquire a certain predominance, as can be observed in a significant number of translations of advertisement, journalistic, technical and scientific texts, as well as in the so-called "anthropophagic"³ version of literary translation. The original text is no longer the privileged and almost exclusive reference, but must be submitted to a "naturalization" process in which the essential parameters are, to a large extent, to be found within the usages and customs of the target language/culture. The beautiful, however unfaithful, will predominate over the exact, as in the French translational tradition. The better the translational origin of the text is cloaked, the more fully and satisfactorily will the target-centered translation be deemed to have been achieved.

3 In the sense of appropriation by the recipient culture, as adopted by the Brazilian Modernism movement in the first half of the 20th century.

At first sight, creative translation would seem to be a variant, if at all, of target-centered translation. It is rather self-evident that the target-centered process, given the significantly higher rate of linguistic-cultural replacements it demands, presupposes a forceful intervention by the translator, who must search for and/or create the relevant linguistic and cultural equivalents, seldom given beforehand. What is less evident, but nonetheless true, is that the intervention of the translator is equally forceful, equally intense, in source-centered translation. Contrary to what occurs with the use of automatic translation software, the transcoding which predominates in source-centered translation is not carried out without an attentive exploring of the virtualities of the target language/culture. To translate *ele estava no mato sem cachorro as il était dans la brousse sans chien*⁴ is not something which is done without investigating the expression's structural feasibility, without testing its euphony, without evaluation its possible receptivity, without ascertaining that the co-texts and contexts will assist the reader of the translated text in providing a sufficient understanding of the underlying communicative intent and cultural values, without a strong motivation to innovate the means of expression of the target language, without accepting the risks inherent to a wager on the acceptability by the target culture of a new, foreign element.

It is thus evident that the creative approach should not be considered as associated with the degree of the translator's intervention in the process and in the product, given that such intervention will always occur, no matter which approach is privileged in a given instance. But, both in source-centered and in target-centered translations, the translator must in one way or another surrender to external injunctions, must conform his/her process and product to external molds, defined either within

4 An example found in a French translation of one of Jorge Amado's novels. An idiomatic expression roughly equivalent to *He was in a boat without a paddle*.

the space in which the original was produced or within the reception space of the translated text. Alternatively, the main emphasis is — or is believed to be — brought onto (i) the first author, the original text, the source language/culture, or (ii) the recipients, the target language/culture. The routines of linguistic and cultural routines of the target discourse are broken and are recast to conform to certain patterns of the first text; or the linguistic and cultural bonds which are a major portion of the original text, are broken, are recast in the idiomaticity and *Weltanschauung* of the second language. In either case, the participation of the translator in the process is intense. But although one may legitimately claim that such participation cannot unfold itself, cannot be lead to a felicitous conclusion without the energy derived from the creative impulse of the conductor of the translational act, the appropriation of the text by the translator is still incomplete, is still defined as a veiled co-authorship, it is still a few steps away from fulfillment.

The creative approach is indeed fulfilled when the translator is able to take on an unveiled co-authorship, when, having overcome the ancient fears derived from the sacralization of the original as well as the more modern fears of displeasing the consumer⁵, the translator endeavors to formulate in the target language and culture his/her very own interpretation, experience, sensitivity, his/her very own text. As a product, the text translated under such circumstances will to a large extent appear similar to the text translated in the target-language approach, but without being subservient to the norms and uses, to the routines, in short, of the target language/culture. Above all, it will be a new text, a fully autonomous text, the text of an author,

5 Consumer who, in feeding the spirit as much as when feeding the body, often adheres to the law of the minimum effort and will tend to demand, on both planes, that every hamburger be equally digestible and its flavor consistently predictable.

not of a "mere" translator, if such a "mere" entity can at all be said to exist.

All such options are, at least *in vitro*, technically feasible. A first question would seek to inquiry into which of the three would be the best, the most correct, the most "faithfully" translational. But this is the sort of question which expressly induces a bias which I believe to be unacceptable. Indeed, I cannot feel at ease with the notion that translatology should be a prescriptive discipline, whose ultimate mission would be to lay the foundations for a "guide to translational good manners."

It would, however, be pertinent to make an attempt at evaluating the technical, cultural, political and ideological implications of each option. Evidently, within the limited space of an article, such attempt cannot hope for more than a brief reference to its multiple aspects, although each one is of the highest importance and do well deserve a more thorough discussion and a more penetrating exploration. Faced with the impossibility of engaging on such a course at this point, I will limit myself to prospect a discussion of the technical constraints of the cultural problem in translation and some possible consequences for a cultural policy. Not in a strictly deductive manner, not in the top bottom sense of the impositive verticality of knowledge but, rather, taking as a starting point a given empirical experience, of a process of recovery which was experienced in a very intense manner.

I here refer to the translation I undertook of certain folk tales of the Norwegian tradition, a first sample of which was published under the title *Askeladden e outras aventuras* and a second, named *Novas Aventuras de Askeladden*, currently under evaluation by the publishers. The challenge of translating into the Brazilian variant of the Portuguese language a selection of the folktales collected by P.C. Asbjornsen and J. Moe in the mid-nineteenth century had, as one of its most powerful motivations, the presentation to the readers of certain features of the Norwegian culture and *Weltanschauung*, and which, to a very large extent, form

the substratum required for a closer reading of the great classics of Norwegian literature (Ibsen, Lie, Hamsun, to mention but a few). Indeed, it is this set of features which, maintained or otherwise recovered in the translation, enable them to manifest their originality and, as far as I can see, render valid, interesting, meaningful and rewarding the enterprise of their translation, and not the plot, the narrative structure, the main thematic threads, which reproduce, sometimes quite literally, the plots, the narratives and the themes common to a great number if not all stories, legends and myths of the macro-civilization of Noah's offspring, the Semic-Indo-European (see Aubert, 1992).

Consequently, the venture proposed was to generate, by means of a set of translational procedures and strategies, a reading in the Portuguese language which, without intending to establish a one-to-one correspondence with the possible readings within the original culture, would provide a possible intersection, would represent a sufficient degree of approximation with the Norwegian language/culture, and thereby justify the translation itself.

An initial remark should be made about the very title of the selection. The term *Askeladden* ("the Ash-Lad"), which, in a number of the tales, identifies the hero, indicates, as from the first contact, the intent of recovering a "Norwegianess", i.e., the cultural features which render these tales special. But what are the elements which make up such "Norwegianess", what are the specific marks which manifest it in the texts and/or between the lines of the original texts?⁶

A first obvious element is the environment. The tales unfold their action against the background of the mountain ranges of the Scandinavian Alps, of the dense pine tree forests, of the countless lakes,

6 The following seven paragraphs are a re-writing of the "Explanatory Notes" which introduce the second selection of folktales from Asbjornsen and Moe, as yet unpublished.

of the unruly waters of the North Sea, of the rural scenery with its log huts, its beaten and less-beaten roads and trails, in which people move about on horseback and by foot. The townships and cities, large or small, are foreign to this world and are almost completely absent — at the very most, the hero seeks bed and board in a hostelry or inn, but there is never any meaningful interaction between the characters and the urban environment, except in the negative sense, of mutual rejection.

With the natural environment, however, the relationship is seldom defined in terms of conflict. The long distances to cover, the cold and deserted plateaus, the dark pine tree forests do not frighten nor do they intimidate, they are an integrate part of the world of the characters of these tales. The hero and his or her associates may at times be intimidated by the entities which materializes the powers of this nature; but, even then, fear is often mitigated, more often overcome, and by dialogue or struggle, Man's supremacy is established without generating a rupture with the natural environment but, rather, leading to the pacific appropriation of Nature.

Among these entities, the *Trolls* are those which make their presence particularly felt in the Norwegian folktales, and can be said to represent their second major distinctive feature. Frequently associated with the "forces of evil or darkness", they are, in fact, creatures of the night. They most often reveal their presence to men after sunset and an ancient superstition holds that if they are stricken by the first rays of the morning sun, they are changed to stone. The avatars of Count Dracul suffer from a similar weakness.

But the Norwegian folktales explicitly disclose the ambiguity of the *Trolls*. On the one hand, one finds such as capture the princesses and terrify human beings with their three, six or even twelve head and which battle even unto death to bar their way, or such as cast a spell on the prince and transform him into a beast of the forest or, at least, attempt to lure the hero from the narrow path of his/her mission; on the other, one will also find

those who, either out of their own free will or unwillingly assist the hero in his/her adventures. In several of the tales, besides the many-headed kidnapping *trolls* one encounters those — often, although not exclusively, of the female sex, in the form of elderly long-nosed women — who render assistance, who come to the aid of the hero, who provide him/her with magical tools and good advice or direct his/her steps to those who can assist and guide him/her. By much the same token, humans will at times assist the *trolls*, dethroning a tyrant, finding the baby *troll* lost in the high mountain ranges, or midwifing for the Queen of *Trolls*.

Descendants as they are of the *Jotun* of ancient Nordic mythology — some of which intermarried with the *Åser*, i.e., with the Gods of Valhalla —, the *trolls*, not surprisingly, manifest the double personality of their forebearers, the two-fold calling for good and for evil, for heroism and for intrigue, for work and for seduction, for life and for death. They kidnap women and children, but are fair in rewarding services rendered. They are ambiguous like the very forces of nature they are said to represent, including the nature of Man. They are the mirrors of the mountain ranges, of the torrential inland waters, of the winds, the blizzards, the churning seas; they are, likewise, reflections of the greatness and the miseries, of the *Eros* and of the *Thanatos* of the human soul.⁷

Thus, also, the many personifications of the hero — as Askeladden, as Halvor, as the youngest daughter of the king. They also have their weaknesses, their fears, their cheek, their deceitfulness, their seduction, their moments of cruelty and falsehood.

Positive and negative attitudes are therefore shared by humans and by *trolls*. The *trolls* and the

7 As Ibsen well defined in his play *Peer Gynt*, the basic "difference" between *troll* and Man is that a true Man will "strive to be faithful to him/herself", whilst the authentic *troll* "is enough unto him/herself" (*å være seg selv / å være seg selv nok*). A clear indication of the amount of *troll*-nature which exists and manifests itself in the human being.

other mythical creatures also hold the secret to richness, to magic, which they derive from their greater intimacy with the forces of Nature. But humans, when they manage to overcome narrow-mindedness, envy, sluggishness — as represented by Peter and Paul, *Askeladden's* brothers — when they join intelligence with the capacity to listen to the messages and the advice of Nature itself (i.e., with intuition) — be their representatives the *trolls*, several animal forms (the wolf, the fox, the raven), or the amorous relationship itself — they obtain access to this same richness, to the use, in their own benefit, of magic and enchantment, to the prince or princess, to the mastering of death and sickness, to half the kingdom.

In this respect, the Norwegian folk tales clearly differ from the folk songs of the same tradition. The stories of love and heroism, of the battle against the powers of the mythical beings, often result, in these songs, in defeat, in the loss of the human identity and in surrendering to the *troll* element of one's nature. A typical instance is *Liti Kjersti* (Liestol & Semb, 1961). In a melancholic tone, the song tells the story of a young peasant girl, who is desired by the "king of the mountains", i.e., by the *Troll*. Although much against her will, she follows her suitor to the mountain, where all and sundry do what they can to make a *troll* of her. The young girl resists the attempts, but they give her to drink a special mountain brew. The first time she drinks it, she still retains strong memories of her parents, her village, her homeland. The second time she drinks it, these remembrances still enable her to withstand the witchcraft. But the third time she surrenders to the enchantment and acknowledges herself as a member of the *trollfolk*, and all memories of her original humanity perish within her.

In their respective perception of the conflict between lucidity and instinct, between intuition and practical reason, between the human and the over/sub/inhuman, whilst the folk song laments the loss of humanity, the weakness of Man in face of the overwhelming forces of external and internal

Nature, the Norwegian folktales carry a message of optimism, of hope, of confidence in the ultimate victory. And the clear opposition between the folktales and folk songs induce us to understand this message as a constituent pertinent feature of such tales.

Another typical constituent of the Norwegianess of the tales is manifest in the social relationships they depict. As in any other context and in any other latitude, social relationships are based on hierarchies. These, however, although clearly marked, present a much lesser distance between the upper and lower strata than those one finds in other lands, as in the Holy Roman Empire environment of Grimm's fairy tales or in the Caliphate of Baghdad, of the Thousand and One Nights. The "king" is, in fact, the local landed squire, a successful farmer, and in the original texts, is often addressed as "*far*", i.e., "father", never as Your Majesty, Your Highness, or the like. The princes and princesses are sometimes so termed, but, more commonly, as *sons* and *daughters* of the king (*kongesonn*, *kongsdatter*). The effect is that of a proximity blended with authority, a strong but familiar power but extending over a short expanse of territory. The castle of such king is, in fact, the farmhouse, whilst the great treasures, the splendor of gold and silver, the true castles of imposing grandeur and beauty pertain exclusively to the *trolls* or to whomever is able to take possession of them after a strenuous struggle.

Other aspects of the social relations refer to the father/children and man/woman dichotomies. Either with the explicit intention of ascending the social ladder or merely to earn their living and acquire their independence, at some time or another the boys leave behind father and mother, and take their own paths. All, in this sense, are "prodigal sons". This is customary in the tales. This is likewise customary in contemporary Norwegian society, even in the absence of the pressure of material

need which the Social Democracy of the welfare state has to a large extent neutralized.⁸

The man/woman relationship also presents its special features. The hero is frequently a young girl. Not only the princess, but often the prince is the object of efforts of redemption. And both, the savior and the redeemed, if they share a deep affection, will also share the same bed, and procreate, without explicitation but without any shame, marriage crowning their final efforts, as a celebration of a proven love, not as an initiation rite between mutually half-strangers. Here, again, one observes a feature of Norwegian folktales which reflect a social reality of the Nordic countries, of fairly remote roots, and not, as many would tend to believe, reflecting the more recent evolution of the "sexual liberation," a liberation which for a long period, particularly after the II World War, came to be associated, in the view of the rest of the world, with Scandinavia.

The reality of the Norwegian folktales is thus not exclusively linked to their probable Celtic origin; nor is it limited to the Middle Ages of their Nordic inception; nor, yet, is it restricted to the success they achieved when they were "rediscovered" and put down in written form, in the mid-nineteenth century, within the context of the tardy Norwegian Romanticism. The Norwegian folktales are not a mere historical, literary and political monument, nor a set of dated texts. On the contrary, these tales are an integrate part of contemporary everyday life, as a faithful picture of the Nordic landscapes, and appeal, even today, to the

same sensitivity towards Nature; they live in the daily iconography and in the linguistic expression of a whole society, covering all generations. They are landmarks of a significant portion of national identity and of each individual's identification as a member of the community. They are, in short, an integrate and living portion of the cultural and referential heritage of the 4.3 million inhabitants of the country, in the homes, in the schools, in interior decoration, in jewelry, in the parks, in literature, in painting, in music, in political caricature, in stock phrases and other idiomatic expressions, in the opening ceremonies of the Winter Olympics. They are more current, more present, more deeply seated in the awareness of the people and more frequent and widespread than the equivalent representations of the Viking sagas.

Moving over to the structural linguistic aspects opposing the Norwegian and the Luso-Brazilian language, the morphological and syntactical differences are, as a rule, of little relevance to the translation of the Norwegian folktales, generally related to the more strictly arbitrary components of the respective language codes.

The lexical — or morpholexical — configuration of the said codes, however, appears as a possible source of difficulties. Indeed, the word formation process of agglutination of lexical roots, widely employed in Norwegian as, indeed, in most Germanic languages, generates a legion of relatively motivated signs. This is illustrated by the proper nouns *Askeladden* and *Grimsborken*; by the cases of "princess", frequently referred to as *kongsdatteren* (literally "king + possessive + daughter + definite"), in lieu of *prinsesse*, and of *kongsgård* (literally "king + possessive + farm(house)"), relating to a typically Norwegian extralinguistic (referential) reality. Such relative motivation, in the Saussurian sense of the term, evidently produces, by accrual, a whole set of effects, stressing, in particular, a certain conceptual "concreteness", a "proximity" and a "transparency" inherent to the original language. Granted

8 This feature is fairly "odd" for the target culture (Brazil), in which children of all social strata, even up to their twenty-odd years of age and above, tend to remain living with their parents until such time as they marry and it is therefore assumed that if they leave home before such time, something very serious must have occurred. Thus, for instance, in no Brazilian version of the story of the *Three Little Pigs* is there any allusion to the mother pig telling her offspring that the time has come for them to leave home and live their lives on their own.

the difficulty of reproducing such effects in a language in which root agglutination is a non-active process, as in the case of Portuguese, and in which the sign system is significantly more arbitrary (unless one is conversant with Classical Greek and Latin), leaving a very reduced margin for searching alternative solutions generating similar effects within the lexicon, on the other hand, the mere abandon of any attempt at reproducing such effects would remove from the texts a typical feature thereof. Furthermore, proximity, concreteness and transparency contain a potentiality for captivating the reader of the translation, facilitating an approximation with texts representative of a somewhat distant culture.

The preceding is a brief outline of a set of linguistic and cultural features, peculiarities and specificities which, as found in the source texts, justify a translational enterprise to the Brazilian language/culture. It remains, it should be stressed, but a brief outline, and not a thorough description, sufficient, however, to pursue the primary goal defined herein, viz. to conduct, as it were, a "technical" evaluation of the basic translational options.

Returning to the initial question, and rewording it so as to mitigate its normative bias, which of the three approaches — source-centered, target-centered, creative or translator-centered —, as previously defined, would best ensure the success of the enterprise?

If one observes the translation of the Norwegian folktales, one will soon perceive that the option for an attempt to reclaim their "Norwegianess", and which would apparently lend support to the adoption of an essentially source-centered approach, in actual fact has led the translational operation over more complex (and, one might presume, richer and more diversified) paths.

The redemption itself was, in fact, carried out by making a deliberate use of source-centered strategies, including: syntagmatic constructions (name + preposition + noun phrase), as in "filha do rei" (i.e. "daughter of the king") and (less fre-

quently) "fazenda/ quinta/solar do rei" (i.e., "farm-house/estate of the king"), in alternation with the more arbitrary and more commonplace lexical forms of the target language ("princesa", "castelo"); the aforementioned loans; the transposition of certain idiomatism, e.g. the "refrain" of the heroes' long journeys — *langt og lengre enn langt* — "far and further than far"; the introductory text by the editor/translator, which attempts to elucidate aspects which otherwise would have required extensive footnoting, an alternative deemed less appropriate for a translation aiming to reach out (not exclusively, but certainly also) to the non-academic adult and infant reader groups; the maintenance of the physical and social environments, despite any sense of 'foreignness' which they might cause in Brazilian recipients; and, last but not least, the reproduction of the original illustrations of the tales, which restore, better than any explicit language-bound digression, a significant portion of the sought for cultural transparency.

But such strategies are but part of the sum total of the tools employed in the translation of the Norwegian folktales. If, on one hand, the source-centered approach directly serves the aim of reclaiming the original culture, the target-centered and the creative approaches provide the vehicle for such reclaiming. Through creativity, the voice of the translator makes itself manifest, generating an effect closer to the effect of an "original text", and, thus, more convincing that the effect which can be wrought by a mere bearer of an alien voice. One of the tales which were more thoroughly re-elaborated in this sense is "Bola de Manteiga"⁹, in which the several ailments used by the *Troll* as an ill-concealed excuse for inducing Butterball to enter the hag's sack and be taken to be stewed in her cauldron, the recipe for Butterball stew, and the designation of the *Troll's* daughter as *Trolleta* have all been created by the translator himself. And the

9 From the original *Smorbukk*, or, as it appears in an English version (Iversen & Norman, 1960), *Butterball*.

choice by the publisher of the illustrations of this tale to compose the cover of the first collection, would seem to indicate that the approach achieved felicitous results. Albeit to a lesser degree, in all other tales similar solutions appear, often with the intent of filling out explanatory gaps. Thus in *O Cavaleiro Verde*,¹⁰ when the stepmother imprisons the princess in a subterranean house, the original text tells us that

Her satt hun og sorget, og tiden falt lang og lenger enn lang.

which, in a fairly direct translation, would correspond to the Portuguese

*E lá ficou ela, se lamentando, e o tempo lhe pareceu longo e mais longo do que longo.*¹¹

but which, in the final translated version, reads as follows:

*A princesa chorou e lamentou-se muito. Sem sol, sem lua ou mesmo uma pequena estrela que fosse, o tempo parecia-lhe ter parado por completo.*¹²

Resorting to the target-centered approach, the Norwegian *mil* and *pund* were converted into *léguas* (equivalent to 4,5 miles) and into *arrobas* (approx. 31 lb), the polite form of address *De* into *Vosmecê*, *skilling* into *tostões* (an ancient 10 réis coin), *kjerring* into *véia*, *kongsgård* into *castelo*; the high rate of syndeton coordination was partially replaced by asyndetic coordination, and subject/object pronoun agreement in several instances was adapted to the colloquial norm of Southeastern Brazil (*você/te*). Although *Askeladden* has retained his original name, instead of resorting to adaptations (*Zé Cinzento*, *João das Brasas* or the like), his

brothers, whenever named, are systematically identified as *Pedro* and *Paulo*, not as *Per* and *Paul*.

But a few hybrid solutions were also employed. Thus, for instance, an apparent loan word can cloak a creative element, as in the translation of the legal tender *specidaler*, which, at the reception point of the Brazilian culture, would, but for the cloaking, immediately evoke North-American and not Nordic associations, and thereby induce in a cultural misinterpretation. In this case, the translation presents a sort of 'second degree loan word', in the form of *thaler*, etymologically correct and otherwise widely unknown to the readers in general, save for an odd coin collector or so and for the admirers of Empress Maria Thereza's generous bosom.

Seemingly eclectic, the casting of strategies and approaches described above must not be understood as due to hesitations or incoherences. It derives from the very translational intent of ensuring that the original culture would be fairly well reclaimed. And this intent can only be achieved, is only made feasible, 'Norwegianess' can only become assimilated in a broader social extent if, side by side with the markers of its specific features, the readers are able to find elements of identification, of communion, of familiarity which will render otherness palatable, which will promote the gradual expansion of their *Weltanschauung*, without cultural shocks which could easily result in rejection, in a refusal to engage in transcultural interaction, in silence.

Obviously enough, it is difficult, not to say strictly impossible for the translator himself to evaluate his success in the implementation of his proposal, to estimate, with a reasonable degree of precision, the distance between the goals aimed at and the goals actually attained. However, a translator who also proposes himself as a student of translatology may be allowed to infer certain conclusions from the theoretical and pragmatic itineraries which have been sketched herein and presuppose his capacity to generalize from a single

10 From the original *Den Gronne Ridder* (The Green Knight).

11 And there she sat and bewailed herself, and time fell heavy on her.

12 The princess wept and bewailed herself. Without the Sun, without the Moon or even a tiny star, time seemed to have

specific case to a fair number of translational operations, between any two language/culture sets. Thus, in the following, references made to 'Brazilianity' and 'Norwegianess' may and should be understood as references to any two linguistic and cultural poles which confront each other in any translational act.

However varied the many individual readings, however extensive the flexibility and the relativity which should be ascribed to notions and concepts such as 'Brazilian/Norwegian *Weltanschauung*', it nevertheless remains that the possible Brazilian readings, with the support of its vernacular, are not and indeed cannot be coincidental with the possible Norwegian readings. But the fact that they are not and cannot coincide does not preclude an intersection between these readings or, at the very least, between a certain number thereof. And such intersection does not occur solely thanks to given linguistic and cultural universals, does not anchor itself only on the shared experiences and representations of the Semitic-Indo-European macroculture, does not manifest itself exclusively in individuals which, due to their personal biographies, are participants, in several degrees, of both languages and of both cultures. By adopting certain translational approaches and materializing such approaches in certain interlingual and intersemiotic translational instruments, something of the possible original readings, something of the initial 'Norwegianess' may indeed be apprehended, experienced, paraphrased, inoculated in the apprehension and in the experience of the world which typifies Brazilian culture. The latter is thus expanded and becomes more manifold by the incorporation of elements from the possible Norwegian readings; and such incorporation will necessarily bring about a shift in the previous patterns of experiencing, of apprehending and of expressing reality, thereby resulting in an approximation, however modest, to the Norwegian readings.

And here I cannot refrain from manifesting a certain frustration with the fact that a potentiality of the translational adventure, save in a laboratory

situation or as a — doubtful — test of "faithfulness", is very seldom explored. What distinguishes the Brazilian readings from the Norwegian readings can, indeed, be conceived of as a key to a better understanding, by the Norwegians themselves, of their original reality. The image which the other has of me and the image I have of the other, images which meet in this privileged space of expression which is translation, may induce an approximation, a mutual enrichment. Not only may the Brazilian *Weltanschauung* become richer with the incorporation of Norwegian linguistic and cultural values. These, in turn, if only one were able to return to the source the something of manner whereby the original text was perceived in the target culture — something parallel to what, under a still fairly recent occasion, was the New York staging of the Brazilian production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* — would have their scope, their self-perception, their self-knowledge expanded by an approximation with the Brazilian image. And thus, step by step, and with the decisive support of the translational process, something which evidently will not be the original, pre-Babelic, communion, but a new universal communion, may be erected.

It could ... but will not necessarily be so. If the correlation of forces, in the political, cultural and economic senses of the term, were to favor, whether by the target-centered or by the source-centered approach, an excessively radical shift in the space of reception, the possible return will run the risk of taking a form which will merely confirm the dominant *Weltanschauung*, and not serve the purpose of a contribution to its reformulation. The relative instability of languages initially alluded to provides openings and spaces for a fairly advanced, if not complete conduction of the translational act, over and beyond the limits which the neo-Humboldtian theory and the more recent disciples of deconstruction would have imposed on it (see, *inter alia*, Aubert, 1993, and Rodrigues, 1994). But, for this same reason, it renders possible the dismantling, the rape of the entire language/culture texture. In-

stead of ensuring the audibility and intelligibility of the polyphony of languages, of cultures, or experiences, it can bury it in a pasteurizing uniformity, conducted under the baton of the dominant maestro. Thus, if either source-centered or target-centered translation is not seasoned by the translator's individual creativity, and if the translation does not uphold as his/her main concern the harmonization of the multiple voices in a whole which is greater than the mere juxtaposition of its components, the desired polyphony will be defeated and only a monochord tone, preluding silence, will remain.

As Riobaldo, the backland gunman which is the hero-narrator of Guimarães Rosas great epic *Grande Sertão: Veredas*, very pointedly remarked: "to live is a dangerous business." So, one may add, is translation.

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Submitted in 1994.