

OTHERS' POETRY: JOSÉ PAULO PAES AND TRANSLATION WORK

Adriana Seabra¹

Abstract

José Paulo Paes (1926-1998) was a poet, translator and vice versa. Won several literary awards throughout his career, including 11 Jabuti awards: five for translated works, five for his own poetry, another for a book of essays. He said he did not trust a poet who does not think about his craft, then he became also an essayist; neither trust a poet who does not learn from other poets, especially of languages other than his own, so through the translation of poetry, he made a writing workshop for himself.

In this article, we hypothesized that, regarding the poems of José Paulo Paes, making copyright a criterion for the demarcation of his poetry, excluding his translational production, is something that provides fractional view, hence impoverished, of a set of texts badly and poorly cleaved in the "work" and "translation" categories. Similar discursive and textual procedures identify the style of both the poetic translations and the poetry under the signature of José Paulo Paes, and this is especially noticeable when it comes to the appropriation, by this author, of two poetic genres of Greco-Latin antiquity: the epigram and the ode .

Therefore, to find the specificity of the poetry of José Paulo Paes, we should investigate the relationship between the "original" production of this poet and his reading, or rereading, of ancient poetic genres. Something that could be done, for example, examining how in his "original" poetry some elements borrowed from a rhetorical discourse that is characteristic of all ancient Greek and Latin poetry appear.

Keywords

Theory of translation , poetry , rhetoric , authorship , originality.

1.

In funeral oration for José Paulo Paes, given by Classics professor João Ângelo Oliva Neto, of Universidade de São Paulo, he enlarged Paes literary qualities by mentioning the wide variety of genres in what he was versed: "poet, author of stories for children, essayist and translator of prose and poetry". And to avoid confusing diversity with dispersion, he said what meant unifying this plethora: "The importance of its work is, before anything, due to having carried

¹ Professor of DIEESE School of Labour Sciences.

out diverse areas where he acted his liveliness of poet"².

This eulogy exalts the dead, or perhaps decreases him, since reiterates deplorable splitting between author and artisan, according to what author attributes for himself the prerogative of creation and the artisan, essayist or translator, the deleterious statute of imitator, mere repeater or, at best, interpreter.

This topic goes back to German idealism, which shaped the figure of transcendentalist poet, from reflections on intuition, inspiration and imagination³, mental faculties whose excellence would be a distinctive trait of tempered poets. The notion of being *tempered* told apart rhetoric distinction used until the Enlightenment, between *ars* and *ingenium*, attributes of the poet. Broadly, ancient rhetoric comprehended *ars* as a technique and set of taught and repeated precepts forming a custom; and comprehended *ingenium* as natural talent exerted by imitating past models and observance of transmitted precepts. The temper, on the contrary, would be an innate disposition in the artist, inaccessible to teaching or prescription, since *rule* that temper imprints to art is not a recipe that can be repeated, but a principle obtained through inspiration. Therefore, temper's rule is not taught and can only be abstracted from the artistic product by men of talent with same sound mind than those of genius⁴.

Once established disparity of "genius" between the poet, or creator, and the translator, or copyist, this will be present in whole further discussion about translatability or untranslatability of poetry. This is implied, for example in Haroldo de Campos words in his book of 1962 "Translation as creation and criticism" (*Da translation como criação e como crítica*) where he defends the viability of translating poetry, if done as "transcreation", a play on words with transcription. His main argument is that considering specificity of aesthetical information and condensation of poetic language, it would simply be impossible transpose a poem into another language. The only way to translate poetry maintaining aesthetical information elaborated in source language would be recreating it in the target language.

The reasoning of Campos is based on the distinction, credited to Max Bense, between *documentary, semantic and aesthetic information*, which in general lines may be summarized saying that documentary and semantic information admit several codifications, and could be transmitted in many ways; while aesthetic information can only be codified as it was transmitted by the artist. In documentary and semantic information, redundancy is high, whereas in aesthetic, is the lowest possible: "difference between aesthetic maximum possible information and concrete aesthetic information, is always minimum in the work or art". This would be origin of untranslatability of aesthetic information: even being semantically equivalent, a translation could never transpo-

2 OLIVA NETO, J. A. "Um saldo da generosidade literária da José Paulo Paes". Published by Jornal da Tarde, October 17, 1998

3 Cf. SCHLEGEL, F. *Conversa sobre a poesia*; NOVALIS. Pólen.

4 KANT, *Crítica do Juízo* § 46.

se the aesthetic information contained in the source language. And Campos concludes:

If we admit the thesis that translating creative texts is impossible in principle, it seems that this breeds corollary of a possibility, also in principle, recreating these texts. Then we will have as Bense wants, in other language in different aesthetical and autonomous information, however both will be interconnected by an isomorphic relationship: they will be different while languages, but like isomorphic bodies, they will crystallize within the same system⁵.

Roman Jakobson, before Campos, delimited issue of “untranslatability of poetry on *Linguistic aspects of translation*, of 1959, based in impossibility of interlinguistic transposition of “verbal equations” and particularly of play on words:

In poetry, verbal equations are raised to text constitutive principle category. Syntactic and morphologic categories, its roots, its affixes, phonemes and its components (distinctive traits) - in sum, all verbal code constituents – are compared, juxtaposed, placed in a contiguity relationship, according to the principle of similarity and contrast, therefore transmitting an own signification. The phonological *similarity* is seen as kinship semantics. The play on words, or using a more erudite and perhaps more precise word: the paronomasia, queen of poetic art; no matter if this denomination is absolute or limited, poetry is, by definition untranslatable. What is possible is creative transposition (...)⁶

However Jakobson and Campos point to the need of “creatively transpose” poems, they do not mention constraint of “transcreation” notions of author and authorship. Thus they leave untouched literary institution arrangements that condemn the translator to the condition of a producer lacking in originality, without intellectual property of his work, and without collecting the one he might eventually produce⁷.

José Paulo Paes, follower of Jakobson and Campos, theorizes about poetry translation by recovering from them the idea of similarity between procedures creative and translating procedures. However his focus is especially directed to the authorial status of “author” and “translator”:

Unlike him [i.e., the poet] the translator does not work in a plan of heteronyms but of synonymy, he is aiming less to absolute than approximate nomination, and therefore does not have status of creator, but re-creator⁸.

5 CAMPOS, H. “Da tradução como criação e como crítica” p. 24

6 JAKOBSON, R. “Aspectos lingüísticos da tradução” p. 72

7 Cf.: HANSEN, J.A. “Autor” p. 37

8 PAES, J.P. “Sobre a tradução de poesia” p. 36

It is true he is a re-creator, but copes with material virtually insurmountable with “Jakobson’s verbal equations” or in more common words, with figurativeness of language. This is why poetry is a “borderline-case” problem of translation, as José Paulo Paes states:

As it was remembered at the beginning of these considerations, being poetry a borderline-case in the general problem of translations, it is in translator’s performance when he is more close to author’s status. It is true he comes close to him, however he cannot equal him, since use of criterion of equality is fallacious in the command of translation. [...] The wiser would be seeing them (creator and re-creator) correlated by a nexus of proximity or congeniality, more than inferiority of the first one regarding second one: poetry translation is as Steiner well says, trade between poets.

[...]

The basis of congeniality should be in the re-creator repeating in a second instance, the translating one, the same gesture done by the poet in first instance, the creative one⁹.

To the alleged disparity of genius between author and artisan, José Paulo Paes answers with a proposed “congeniality” between translator and poet. His determination to add euphoria to the disregarded translating activity stumbles when he tries to do it by transferring to the artisan the authorial prestige due to the poet. Regarding this, it is not unreasonable remembering the irony of literary critic Paul de Man, stating that every translator is, “by definition, badly paid, by definition overloaded with work, by definition the one which history will not really remember as an equal... unless, incidentally he also is a poet”¹⁰.

The “congeniality” mentioned by Paes is manifested as a sort of emulation of the poet regarding the translator, in an inversely proportional relationship to the one that would join the “literary creator” to the edenic nominator. The objective of the comparison is to value translation as a new original and the translator as a sort of author in second degree. Let’s see:

Post-edenic itinerary of the creator poet has a symmetric parallel, but opposite to the itinerary of re-creator translator. The creator poet struggles to preserve in a sociolect, the idiolect; this departs from a sociolect (a source language) going to another sociolect (a target language), trying to reconstruct on it the virtual idiolect on that. However, by virtue of the linguistic refraction – the transit through different densities -, does not reconstruct same idiolect, but another, equivalent to it and congenial in metalanguage¹¹.

However, it is worth mentioning that according to this argument, author-

9 *Op. cit.* p. 45

10 *Apud*: ARROJO, R. “Tradução” p. 419.

11 *Op. cit.* p. 45

ship of the translator is lessened to a large extent by a capital functional element of the language, the "linguistic refraction" which acting as a machine of choosing senses¹², is interposed between a translating attempt to reconstitute the original idiolect and effective production of a "congenial" idiolect to the one of the metalanguage. There is no exception in the result of Paes' analysis regarding intended purpose, since it transfers attribute "originality", distinctive of the author, not only to the translator but also to the "linguistic refraction", absorbing the psychology of the writer and delegates its role – of efficient cause of the text – to the linguistic code.

Both displacements – empirical producer transfer of authorship to a linguistic code; and transposition of author's genius of poet into translator – still presuppose an "origin" asserting each artistic product as different regarding all others. Nevertheless, while "originality" is maintained as criterion to appreciate works, disdain to what is condemned a translator and his work will not cease.

2.

To fight against priority of "creation", French critique of the 60's and 70's inaugurated the notion of writing. Opposite to creation, writing is open and its meaning is only established through reading, therefore it should be the recipient and not the issuer, the responsible for authorship function. In the presence of a writing, nothing justifies taking the text as a predicate whose subject would be the person of the writer "in the flesh"; an encrypted subject, only accessible to the skills of the critic. There is no reason to search for a text with the attributes of a founder personality and extract from them an intention or reason, conscious or not, of what is written. Barthes kills the author and "what he wanted to say" also dies:

Once author is distant from text, pretension to "decipher" it becomes totally useless. Giving an author to a text is imposing it a mighty obstacle, provide it with an ultimate meaning, and end the writing. This conception is much suitable to the critic, which then wants to assume an important task in finding the author within his work (or his hypotheses: society, history, psyche, freedom); once the author is found, text is "explained", and the critic won; therefore it is not surprising that, historically, the reign of the author also becomes reign of the critic, neither that the critique (even if it is new) be currently shaken at the same time than the author¹³.

Foucault rectifies Barthes, claiming it is not enough declare death of the author. That would lead to a vain statement without a detailed investigation regarding empty space revealed by disappearance of the author. According to Foucault, this space belongs to a qualifying function: the name of the author demarcates a group of texts somehow related: by homogeneity, relationship,

12 Regarding role of "linguistic refraction" in poetry, we can take as an example Herberto Helder, proposing an interesting way of "random" association of syntagmas in the "Lyric Machine".

13 BARTHES, R. "A morte do autor" p. 69

mutual authentication, reciprocal explanation or concomitant use. However this function does not appear spontaneously by attributing a discourse to an individual, it is constructed through a “complex operation” building the character we classify as author:

There is, probably, intention to give this rational being a realistic statute: the individual would receive a “deep” instance, a “creating power”, a “project”, the native place of writing. Nevertheless, what is appointed as author (...) is merely a projection, in more or less psychological terms of the treatment to what we are submitting texts, the approximations we produce, the traits we establish as appropriate, the continuities we admit or the exclusions we make¹⁴.

Foucault draws a historical outline to show that, as well as treatment of texts changed over time, also the “author-function” was not carried out in a homogeneous and unchanged way. For example, fiction discourses that would have circulated through by medieval Europe, without being imperative mentioning name of the author. However, from Renaissance, author’s name began to be required as a way of sorting literary materials, and after Romanticism, it was no longer being accepted literature missing authorial identity. Be it prose or poetry, every text must state who wrote it, in what date, and based in what project. Emergence of authors would be literary counterpart of emergence of concept of individuals in history of ideas. Therefore its birth would be related to the news that writing could become transgressive – as a means of resistance against forms of social coercion – thus writer also began to be legally responsible for his work.

Before Barthes and Foucault, Walter Benjamin had mentioned role of authorship to determine intellectual property, dislocating traditional Marxist question of representation of relations of production in literary works, to ask himself how works would fit in “the interior” of these same relations. He was recognizing in authors a statute of producers, as any goods producer in capitalist system, even subject to alienate his workforce¹⁵.

From all these contributions, it is interesting to withhold that the institution “author” due to the fact that is not universal or transhistorical, much less natural or intrinsic to texts, is not something whose implications might be ignored when trying to analyze or explain “works”. Especially, because authorship is intrinsically the basis for notion of work, as Foucault warns, when criticizing structuralist autonomy of the “work”, perhaps highest side effect of death of the author:

It is said indeed that the function of criticism is not detecting relations of work and author, or reconstructing through texts a thought or an experience. Its function is to analyze the work in its structure, architecture, intrinsic form and

14 FOUCAULT, M. *O que é um autor*. pp. 50-1

15 Cf. BENJAMIN, W. “O autor como produtor” p. 122. Also: EAGLETON, T. *Marxism and literary criticism*. p. 59-70.

the game of its internal relations. Now we have to face a problem: "What is a work? What is this curious unity named work? What elements compose it? Isn't a work what has been written by somebody named author?" We see difficulties emerging. If an individual would not be an author, what did he write or said, what did he leave in his pages, what was inherited from him; could we call it a "work"?¹⁶

Both "work" and "author" are literary conventions, therefore we cannot let go unscathed in analytical work of texts. In the particular case of José Paulo Paes poetry, it is worth thinking about hypothesis of using originality as a criterion of demarcation of the work, excluding translating production, this would bring a partial and impoverished view of a set of texts precariously divided in "work" and "translation" categories.

There are several textual procedures that typify poetry and poetical translations signed by José Paulo Paes. These procedures point more similarities than distinctions between the two sets of texts. Such similarities cannot obviously be credited to originality, since translations to be "congenial", should have to lack translator's idiosyncrasies. They should previously have, as a "transcreation", to reconstitute in metalanguage the original idiolect of the author; thus reiterating the subsidiary translator's work character.

To face this conception, translator Rosemary Arrojo quotes authority of Freud and Saussure, which in each of their respective fields - conceptual and specific disciplinary, would have verified inevitability of mismatch between signifier and meaning, present in any language performance. Arrojo postulates, based in the "inevitability of the metaphor", that everything which is traditionally considered as lost or alienated from its origin, when a text is traduced from one language into another, may also potentially get lost or alienated in any reading process within the interior of the *same* language¹⁷.

Thus, recovering the "original" would be so unlikely in both reading and translation, since there is no origin, in its immutable and archetypical form, to where it could come back. However and considering it may be stated the impracticability of a "transport of stable meanings from one language into another", it remains feasible imagine translation as a modality of reading. A productive reading, since always responds with a new text to a text already read.

3.

But poetry critique is just a stubborn redoubt of exaggerating in biographies. It often faces lyricist side as a literary expression of psychic interiority of the author; where happens an association between literary quality and frankness – between quality of fiction and richness of life experience – so many times objected by poets, and so many proposed again by critics:

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 37-38

¹⁷ Cf. ARROJO, R. "Tradução" p. 427

I have never lived in the country. I haven't even visited the country for short while. Nevertheless I wrote a poem in which I praise the countryside, where I write that my verses are a tribute to the countryside. The poem is insignificant. It is indeed the most insincere construction: a true fallacy. But, it crosses my mind: is that true insincerity? Does not art always lie? Or, rather, is it not when art lies the most, is it then that it creates the most? When I wrote these verses, was it not an artistic achievement? (The fact that the verses were imperfect is not perhaps due to the lack of sincerity; for how very often one fails, even armed with the sincerest of impressions).¹⁸

That excerpt of Constantine Cavafy is exemplary in discrediting identification between poetical matter and life experience of the author. Although understanding fictioning process of myself, we have to admit that only figure of author made by text, can be deduced from it. There is a need of taking precautions against the illusion or lyric fiction and consider existential references of text as expression of author's life experience.

The empiric author is inapprehensible, and would continue being so, even if Cavafy would always have lived in the country. The sincerity of a poem is not biographic but imitative, and is related to subject of the statement, not to the author. Cavafy himself attests it when he tells that sentimental confession in the poem is a construction, even if the writer, motivated by a genuine emotion wanted to write about it. After "somebody seats and begins to write" what will be recorded in the letters, will be distinguished as artifice of empiricism:

What a deceitful thing Art can be when you want to apply sincere! You sit down and write – often speculatively – about emotions, and then, over time, you doubt yourself¹⁹.

From José Paulo Paes point of view as translator and commentator of Cavafy, through these writings, the Greek poet would be denying the "romantic-naturalist fallacy of sincerity set up as value criterion":

(...) He establishes a clear contrast between sincerities of emotion and art. He definitely takes sides with sincerity of art when he asks using an affirmative sentence: "Does not art always lie? Or, rather, is it not when art lies the most, is it then that it creates the most?"

But when Paes plays the role of critic, Paes erases several times²⁰ the outline separating empirical sincerity from artistic sincerity. For example when he writes the preface of his own translation of Palladas of Alexandria, he states the following regarding ancient epigrams:

¹⁸ KAVÁFIS, K. Reflexões sobre poesia e ética p. 25 (Twenty seven notes on Poetic and ethics)

¹⁹ Idem ibidem, p. 41

²⁰ This happens in all introductory texts to his own ancient poetry translations, which are mentioned in this paper's bibliography.

As it happened in other Classical Antiquity literature genres, the field of epigrams also included a repertoire of subjects and motifs more or less permanent, established from the performance of great authors of the past. To imitate them was a standard of good taste in art, but *feelings and personal experiences of each poet – from best, at least - ended up by overcoming to simple imitation, redeeming the common-place of its banality.*²¹

In this case, the critic substitutes the genius and artistic skills - whose quality allowed ancient poets adding decorous variations to the imitated model - by feelings and "personal experiences" that in a romantic key awarded to the work of "the best" the possibility of exceeding common condition of copy and claim statute of original. It is clear that what rules demands of the critic is, once again, a "romantic naturalist" command of originality in creation; while for Palladas coetaneous, as for all those who produced under the regime of ancient poetry²², it would be almost inconceivable tell something unpublished, and if anyone would do it, would be showing a certain lack of skill or even madness, rather than any artistic quality worthy of praise.

Davi Arrigucci Jr. guides Paes poetry reading by same trend of informing about work of the author through his biographic data, and instead, of revealing the personality of a man through elements found in his work. He begins the first paragraph of his essay *Agora é tudo História* by mentioning:

José Paulo Paes poetry, brief and sharp in each constant move towards the epigram, can be read as if it would be a man's whole life songbook, answering world appeals and his inner existence with poems²³.

It is not surprising than poetry reading using these parameters does not accept texts published with the seal "translations". In what way texts originated from so many other authors could answer for "inner existence", and therefore literary originality, of only one and a single individual?

Arrigucci places his reading of the work in the tension between ancient satire matrix of roman epigrams and dialogues with political and social circumstances of Brazilian historical moment, after military coup of 1964. The critic proposes that essentiality of Paes epigrams, and therefore its singularity regarding the Roman gender, lies in the bond with historical issues. This is the criterion synthesizing at the end of the essay his hypothesis:

Singular in its face due to a peculiar formula to reduce the world, each short poem brings in its own foundations typical traits of the epigram and its vocation to express general traits of politeness. This is why sometimes it reminds us ancient Latin epigrams. But the essential is that the historical moment is consti-

21 PAES, J.P. "Introdução" In: PALADAS DE ALEXANDRIA. *Epigramas*. p. 26

22 See, for example, Horatius discussion regarding characters and unpublished plots in tragedy. HORÁCIO et alii. *A poética clássica* p. 58-59

23 ARRIGUCCI, JR, D. "Agora é tudo história" p. 187

tutive part of its form, at the core of these ingenious lyric and told words.²⁴

However there is no essentiality at all in this, since history and particularly politics are also part of the substance of the satiric Roman epigram. Arrigucci himself had admitted shortly before this, with judgment:

In its formal condensation, especially metonymic, due to the relation with surrounding reality, sometimes also object of allusion, the epigram at the same time comply with its ancient social and political function, as in ancient Rome of Martial and Juvenal, claiming elementary rights of the citizens, now reduced, with a temper joke to "suicide-zens".²⁵

If we are trying to find specificity in José Paulo Paes study of epigrams, it would perhaps be valuable to sweep relations between poet's "original" production and his readings, or re-readings of ancient poetical genders. This could be done, for example, verifying how are in the "original" work all the characteristic pieces of a rhetoric speech related to the whole ancient Greek and Latin poetry, and therefore an important part of Paes "translating" production.

Further considering the situation, political satire could be a distinctive trait of its epigram; nevertheless not regarding Roman genre, but before pill-poem (a synthetic Brazilian Modernism formula), where focus had main influence in metalanguage. Recovery of politeness done by José Paulo Paes, would revitalize the genre in its Modernist and Brazilian appropriation.

Like in imperial Roma, where public word was prohibited - a trait of previous republican period, also in Brazil and due to military government's authoritarianism, irony allowed words transposing bans. This fact permits observing frequency not only of ancient poetry forms in Paes poetry, but also examples of stylized genre, where formal aspect of epigram is seen again, as Arrigucci suggests, keeping measured-expression, structure of stanzas, sound poetry, syntax and figurativeness conventions in text topic lists. This speech property, named *decorum* by Romans, establishes boundaries between speech genres and follows a double determination: *external*, based in adapting speech to reception conditions; and *internal*, granted by compliance between expression and content.

When oppression and citizenship deprivation cease being urgent issues, Paes poetry production, still carrying irony, abandons ostensible resource of epigram. The "odes" published in *Prosas seguidas de odes mínimas* of 1992, are more encouraging texts, which together with ancient odes, establish a different speech than the one perceived and identified by Arrigucci, regarding epigrams. These "odes" engage in a controversy with Horatius odes, perverting genre's parameters, since they are not properly odes, but literally, parodies.

The contrast between ode a *Tinta de escrever* (The writing ink, down here)

²⁴ *Idem ibidem*. p. 200

²⁵ *Idem ibidem*. p.190

and its Horatius matrix, *Exegi monumentum*, help illustrating inversions in at least one of the species of the genre, the one opposing the ephemeral life of a poet against continuity of the work:

Confront with:

The writing ink
When your noble blue shames to
record the news, write
the ticket, sign the promissory note,
these children of the time. You dream...

More durable is the parchment
where you could, lengthy art in a brief life,
sign, the vitriol epigram, tear
the elegy, bronze the epic.
But since today's lasting doesn't even
wait for the newspaper's ink to dry
it firms in blue, you promise
to the minute and parting, which is all History now.

With:

Ode 3.30- *Exegi monumentum*

And now'tis done: more durable tha brass
my monumento shall be, and raise its head
O'er royal pyramids: it shall not dread
Corroding rain or angry Boreas,
Nor the long lapse of immemorial time.
I shall not wholly die: large residue
Shall 'scape the queen of funerals. Ever new
My after fame shall grow, while pontiffs climb
With silent maids the Capitolian height.
"Born," men will say, "where Aufidus is loud,
Where Daunus, scant of streams, beneath him bow'd
The rustic tribes, from dimness he wax'd bright,
First of his race to wed the Aeolian lay
To notes of Italy." Put glory on,
My own Melpomene, by genius won,
And crown me of thy grace with Delphic bay.

The parody is based in line of argument (*topos* in Greek) inversion of immortal aspect of the work. In Horatius lyric eternity of the *monumentum* opposed to shortness of life; for Paes, on the contrary, the monument becomes

a *moment*: it does not even survive to daily press, and therefore ironically, is shorter than life. Put upside down to topical, puts further away, by forgery, any vestige of what was a ritual lyric function, such as glorifying kings and heroes, still resonating in Horatius text – since praise due to the hero because of his achievements during the war, were addressed by Horatius to the poet, who discloses and immortalizes glory.

José Paulo Paes “lowers” the genre, remodeling it in satirical outlines and, in spite of text size, brings closer ode and epigram. Putting aside grandiloquence and enlarging, its place is taken by a funny chat, the moderate joke. And that poetical game is obviously given to book title of this set of poems: *Odes mínimas* (*minimum odes*).

By infringing Horatius model, this ode a *Tinta de escrever* draws a poetical program: Paes ink goes to the ticket, the news, the promissory note, and little, temporary and every day present things. The vitriol of epigram, the tear of elegy, the bronze of epic – all this is history. But, as in each parody, substitute text remains stressed by the sense of first text. The spectrum of a serious lyric floats, and at the same time it is submitted, mortified to the tomb of the moment, that noble Paes ink – elegant in its resource to the infringement – does not disappear without leaving its blue minute in History.

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