RECENSÃO CRÍTICA

Lewis Carroll, *As Aventuras de Alice no País das Maravilhas e Alice do Outro Lado do Espelho. Translated by* Margarida Vale do Gato. Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, 2000. (320 pages)

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It has often been said that there are two broad approaches to literary translation. The first seeks to render the source text into the target language as faithfully as possible, following the text, wherever feasible, to the letter. The other uses the original as a jumping-off point to create what can be tantamount to a new work. Whether a translator belongs to one camp or the other is often more than a question of personal preference, depending upon what the translator is aiming to produce or has been asked to produce. Furthermore, some works are particularly difficult due to their manifold natures. During the course of *As Aventuras de Alice no País das Maravilhas e Alice do Outro Lado do Espelho*'s narratives, for instance, the text slips in and out of text-types such as morals, narrative, dialogue, original poetry, parody and punning. [1] *Alice* also functions on various different levels, determined largely by the age of the reader, as befits what some have described as "every adult's favourite children's book". It would seem to be stretching ambition to attempt to include the whole of Wonderland in one translation, and foreign publishing houses tend to overcome this hurdle by developing a range of translation to satisfy the different possible readerships. This almost seems to be de facto editorial policy. In the case of Margarida Vale de Gato's *Alice* it would appear that the objective is to present faithfully a Victorian literary artefact to a readership

[1] Maria Cristina Schleder de Borba, "Text diversity, intertextuality and parody in Wonderland", *Fragmentos*, 9, nº1 (jan-jun. 1999), pp 15-22.

of mainly adult Portuguese who might have an interest in the author, the era, or children's literature in general. As Chris Heffer says "Many audiences expect translations of literary classics to convey exactly what was written in the original" [2] and this translation seems to have been produced with this in mind. Introducing a perennial favourite to a new generation does not seem to be a prime concern. This is understandable since Portugal has been well served since the mid-30s with bowdlerised versions of *Alice* produced exclusively for children, while interested adult readers had to wait until 1971 and Manuel João Gomes's translation for the first unabridged *Alice* for grown-ups, complete with an in-depth psychoanalytical commentary. However, since Carroll scholars and commentators have considered the majority of the adult-orientated translations inadequate, [3] and with a view to *Alice*'s canonical status in world literature, it is perhaps natural that current translations should be orientated toward a more adult readership.

The Victorian bias of this translation can be seen before even opening the book. On the front cover pride of place is given to Sir John Tenniel's Punch-style illustrations depicting a very Victorian, very archetypal "English-rose" Alice, while the back cover is dominated by an excerpt from Lewis Carroll's 1886 preface. As María del Carmen Millán-Varela says in relation to translations of *Alice*: "from the type of illustration chosen, we can observe a tendency towards preserving the original features of the source text, that is, its remoteness in both time and space". [4] From the outset, the author and his epoch seem to take precedence over whatever is universal in the story. It is interesting to note in the translation that although the characters are speaking in Portuguese, they pull each other up on the quality of their *English* whenever they find whatever is said unfathomable. It is always made very obvious in the text that Wonderland is situated somewhere below England. This distances the Portuguese reader from the text, having the neat effect of explaining away anything a child would perhaps not understand as foreign and reminding adults that they are reading a foreign classic. "Here" always refers to England and, as fanciful as Wonderland becomes, the

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[2] Chris Heffer, "«Sowing sounds and reaping sense» in Italian translations of Alice", *Fragmentos*, 9, nº1 (jan-jun. 1999), pp. 57-76 (p.58).

[3] Maria del Carmen Millan-Varela, "(G)alicia in Wonderland: some insights", *Fragmentos*, 9, nº1 (jan-jun. 1999), pp.97-117 (p.102).

[4] Maria del Carmen Millan-Varela "(G)alicia in Wonderland: some insights", *Fragmentos*, 9, nº1 (jan-jun. 1999), pp.97-117 (p.102).

only other country mentioned, France, seems a million miles away, as perhaps it was to a little Victorian girl. The translation limits itself to putting a Portuguese veneer on the English original, just enough to make it comprehensible in terms of language. Ostensibly, the translation is exclusively linguistic, not cultural.

While the translation seems to make *Alice* readily comprehensible and entertaining to Portuguese children, it is debatable whether it achieves the same mix of familiar and strange that makes *Alice* so beguiling to children. The characters all refer to a reality that is particularly English. The Mad Hatter, the March Hare, the Dormouse, for example, are all part of the English imagination, albeit in part due to *Alice* itself, with their own historical/botanical roots. The use of mercury in the work of Milliners led to many cases of madness, bucks box each other dementedly in spring and dormouse is practically a synonym for a lazy animal. Translated literally into Portuguese, the game of recognition that is such an important component of these characters, and children's entertainment in general, is entirely lost. The same can be said for the verses subverted in the book. These are clever parodies of well-known or overly sanctimonious poems that Victorian children would have had to learn by rote in the schoolroom. Much of the enjoyment of the nonsense verses would come from familiarity with the poems they were inspired by and the uncanniness of seeing them declaimed by Alice to Carroll's motley menagerie. In the Portuguese version, as ingeniously translated as it may be, this falls by the wayside. It is a contentious issue as to whether recognition of context or merely of type is the lowest common denominator necessary for the enjoyment of parodies. The mockery involved in parody is subject not merely to cultural constraints but temporal ones as well and it could well be argued that an English child today would no more recognise some of the verses than his Portuguese counterpart, yet this would be to ignore the spirit of the original. The question is how much translation should be influenced by contemporary readings of the work. Moreover, even if some of the more moralistic poems have long disappeared from the curriculum and the nursery, what child in England wouldn't giggle at "Twinkle, twinkle little bat" and thrill at the shock of the closed t-sound replacing the original floating 'r' of star? In any case, although it seems true that if the parodic aspect of the re-jigged poems is lost, the subversive element is not. For instance, in his parody of Watt's "how doth the little bee", changed to "how doth the little crocodile", Carroll mischievously replaces a paeon to industry

with one to artful sloth. The effect of the poem is skilfully maintained in the Portuguese, with the lazy croc welcoming the fish into its "risonha bocarra"! Indeed the translator always manages to reproduce not only the spirit but, ingeniously, the structure of the poems too.

In Chapter three of *Alice*, after the animals have extricated themselves from the pool of her tears, the mouse offers to tell them a particularly arid tale to dry them off. He then proceeds to rattle off the history of William the Conqueror as though reciting a shopping list. Boring history lessons are exclusive to no one country, but the use of a period of history totally unfamiliar to them could perhaps distance Portuguese children from the text. In fairness, this seems beside the point for the translator, as indicated by the apposite footnotes at the end, which would surely fill in any gaps an adult Portuguese audience might have in their knowledge. These explain various points of English culture and history, and give the model for the verse parodies. For adult readers this provides an invaluable and necessary reference, but for a child this could perhaps prove distracting. After the flood of tears, in accordance with her Victorian mindset, Alice surmises that since she is near the sea, she will be able to find a train to take her home. Although a trip to the seaside by train is by no means exclusively English or Victorian, the seaside environment she envisages and the cultural echoes it produces are. In the Portuguese text, there is a bald rendition of this into Portuguese language. There is no attempt to shift the system of references into a universe recognisable by Portuguese children. Some aspects of Victorian life seem to have been lost in the translation. Instead of her clipped tones in English, Alice has the uninflected speech of a Portuguese child. Some of the charm of the original is thus lost making some of her actions, such as bowing and curtseying, seem anachronistic. The quaintness of the other characters' speech has also been removed. On p. 129 of the Portuguese, for example, instead of asking if Alice takes him for a dunce, the King enquires as to whether she thinks he has "uma cara de parvo". Although this diverges from the original, the King's slip into a popular form of speech adds to the humour of the episode. In the English version, whilst the main characters seem to be speaking with what is received pronunciation, some of the minions and lesser characters are given what seems like Cockney, Irish or yokel accents. This is rendered in Portuguese by giving the character a slurred or popular turn of speech. Portuguese regional accents could have been used but

this would have had a far more regionally-specific effect than the original. The stark differences in speech pattern that denoted, and continue to denote, class in England have not been reproduced. Indeed, it is hard to see how it could have been.

Given that the translator seems to have given herself a remit to reproduce the original as closely as possible in Portuguese, the puns and plays on words have been very well done. At times they even surpass the original, as on p. 38 of the Portuguese when instead of the crab having the patience of an oyster, it is a "caranguejo com a paciência duma santola", a neat play on words with the idea of having saintly forbearance. Nevertheless, the necessity of finding a Portuguese equivalent whilst sticking closely to the original does give rise to a number of perceived "continuity errors", even if only in spirit. For instance, when Alice goes to the Red Queen's garden party, each suit of cards discharges a different function: "hearts" the royal family, "clubs" the royal guard, "spades" the royal gardeners, and "diamonds" the courtiers. Each suit bespeaks its role. In the Portuguese version "copas" are the royal family, "espadas" are the gardeners, "paus" are the guards and "ouros" are the courtiers. The logical link is broken in the case of the "espadas" ("swords" in Portuguese) being the gardeners. Perhaps it could have been rephrased to fit better, but the preservation of the illustrations would have hamstrung this. In any case, this shows the difficulties inherent in maintaining illustrations across translations. It has been said that Tenniels's illustrations are indissociable from *Alice* as a work, rather than a mere text. Indeed, his illustrations were produced in close collaboration with Carroll. Carroll and Tenniel could therefore be considered joint authors of the *Alice* that exists in England's collective culture, somewhat in the manner of the graphic novel tandem of writer and artist. It cannot be denied that images of *Alice*, such as the Mad Hatter with his poking-out price label, are fundamental to our conception of the characters. This, however, is problematic for translators because some images are tied to words and their meanings (such as suits of cards) and the translation, to work with the illustrations, has to connect with them in the same way, narrowing the compass of what can be done with it.

Sometimes the translator seems to become caught between her impulse to make the book understandable to Portuguese readers and her desire to recreate the original faithfully. This is exemplified by the weights and measures used in the book. Although a compromise seems to have been gingerly reached by

using continental kilometres and English sterling, when Alice finds herself transported to the Ewe's shop in Chapter five of *Through the Looking Glass* she finds eggs on sale for "tostões e centavos"(p. 228). This shuttling between cultures when it is expedient to neat translation seems to follow on from the approach adopted in Margarida Vale de Gato's translation of Tim Burton's *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy*, wherein a very American universe gives way to Portuguese references when these produce a neater translation.[5] Although the shift jars somewhat, it does seem to suit the context better as, in this episode, money is not an abstract measurement but a physical reality. Furthermore, due to the simple fact of the translation being in Portuguese, the Portuguese cultural universe begins to seep into *Alice*. This is perhaps ineluctable, but if a literal translation is the general aim this subverts the purpose. For instance, with the rag-tag assortment of birds that Alice meets in Chapter two, in Portuguese "dodo" becomes "dodó", an animal seemingly absent from the Portuguese imagination as it requires an explanatory end-note, while the non-regionally specific "lory" becomes an "arara", the Brazilian name for the bird. In longer passages of whimsy, departing from the original without totally abandoning it also causes errors in continuity. In Chapter ten, the Gryphon informs Alice that whiting are so called because they clean shoes under the sea (as opposed to blacking on land). When Alice curiously inquires what they are made of, she is peremptorily told "of soles and eels" (p. 102). In the Portuguese, the whiting/blacking joke is very well replaced by one about "pescada" and its name deriving from the fact that "antes de ser já o era". After this however the translation snaps back towards the original, with the Gryphon informing Alice that whiting wear shoes made of "solhas e pregados" (p. 118). It is a clever rendition, and amusing in Portuguese, but it just doesn't follow on like the English, where the punning is all based on vocabulary relating to footwear, giving the puns a crescendo effect which heightens the humour.

Alice is considered a masterpiece in English for its punning, and it is perhaps inevitable that the Portuguese translation lags behind somewhat in maintaining the same logical focus as the English. The best example of this is in Chapter eight, when Alice meets the mock turtle ("Tartaruga fingida" — which gives no

[5] Tim Burton, *A Morte Melancólica do Rapaz Ostra e Outras Estórias*. Translated by Margarida Vale do Gato, Lisbon: Cartonado, 2000.

indication of the play on words and the connection to a well-known dish in England — necessitating another end-note). The Portuguese translation just cannot keep pace with the sheer whimsy of the subjects and the masters at the Mock Turtle's sea-school. As it attempts to keep in step with the English language, one or two very good translations are found but then it disappointingly loses its way. The anecdote about drawling with the drawling-master, an old conger eel that taught drawling, stretching and fainting in coils, is a prime example. It is wonderfully self-contained in English each activity befitting a long twisting eel whilst echoing the art classes *Alice* readers were probably taught, but in Portuguese "o professor era um congro... ensinava-nos Despenho, Destroço e Tintura a carvão" (p. 111) does not have the same impact. The subject equivalents are well found, but the link with the teacher is cut. As a play on words on the Portuguese equivalents of the English, the translation is very clever and surely amusing for children as they would still recognise the school subjects referred to, but it pales in comparison with the original.

The translation seems more satisfactory as a stand-alone work when it eschews following the English too closely and strikes out on its own. The rendition of "Jabberwocky", using mock Galician-Portuguese in place of the original's pseudo Anglo-Saxonisms is a good example of this. Also, although in this instance there is little else that could have been done with this passage, it shows how other parts of *Alice* could have been re-sourced in a Portuguese universe to great effect. Mixing and matching syllables to create neologisms as in the original (a tall order, given that some are still in use today), "Rarrazoado" also employs the hallmarks of old Portuguese in a way that would be familiar to anyone who had studied it, however summarily. The "en"s, "ll"s, "cõ"s and "y"s really achieve the same effect as the "thou"s and "twas"s of the original without slavishly following it, though they draw on different linguistic categories. The one cavil with this is, as Alice says, "houve pelo menos alguém que matou outra pessoa". "Jabberwocky" follows the general pattern of an Anglo-Saxon heroic poem such as *Beowulf*. The hero, alone, slays the monster before returning home to a rapturous welcome and the poem ends with its beginning. This isn't really the stuff of Galician-Portuguese *cantigas*.

One of the drawbacks of the angle of attack used by the translator is that the original meaning is leached, whilst little

new material is brought in to make up the deficit. This is shown in the episode in Chapter three of *Through the Looking Glass* when the gnat explains the names of all the insects to Alice. The Portuguese translation replicates the meaning of the English, but loses its humour. The opposing poles of the English cultural original and the cultural weight of the Portuguese language shows through with the description of the "Snapdragon fly". In Portuguese it is called the "louva-a-deus-que-lá-vou-eu". It is a poor equivalent, especially with Tenniel's illustration depicting an insect that is anything but a praying-mantis. Its body is made of "pudim de ameixa" which elsewhere has been replaced by "bolo de bolacha" (and the literal translation wouldn't suggest the English dessert to a Portuguese reader). And the fact that his head is a raisin burning in brandy is explained by an end-note referring to the English Christmas tradition. Its habits, however, have been acculturated as it no longer nests in a Christmas box, nor eats mince pies and frumenty. The Portuguese version now sleeps in a sock on the hearth and lives off "rabanadas e bolo-rei", staples of any Portuguese Christmas. This jars because it seems out of kilter with the overall purpose of the translation, and illustrates the pitfalls of trying to be English in Portuguese.

In short, as a faithful translation "*Alice no País das Maravilhas e Alice do Outro Lado do Espelho*" is generally ingeniously done and would be difficult to improve on, though the informed reader might occasionally quibble. When one looks at a translation, two general, and discrete, questions usually arise: is the translation good? And is the work itself good? Margarida Vale de Gato's translation seems to answer both these cogently. What perhaps it may not do is to cement *Alice* as a children's favourite in Portugal, which, despite its philosophical, linguistic and theological complexities, is what gives *Alice* the prominence it enjoys in England today. This aim would perhaps have been better served by a looser adaptation of the original. But, in any case, as an attempt to retextualise Lewis Carroll's original in Portuguese, *Alice* represents an intellectual feat of no mean distinction, on a par with Vale do Gato excellent translation of Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market and Other Poems*. [6] This was a bilingual edition and such an editorial choice would perhaps have been beneficial to this edition.

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[6] Christina Rossetti, *O Mercado dos Duendes e Outros Poemas*. Translated by Margarida Vale do Gato. Lisboa: Relógio d'Água, 2001.

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