

ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE YET*

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Echoes of *Alice's Adventures* in Portugal

Portuguese children, and other readers who did not know English, had to wait until the 1940s before they could read the adventures of Alice. In fact, Lewis Carroll's book was only translated into Portuguese for the first time in 1936, and then in an abbreviated version of this exciting story.

The fact is, for a long time publishing for children in Portugal was limited almost exclusively to versions of traditional stories (Portuguese tales, tales by the Brothers Grimm and Andersen, above all) and to some books of French origin. Here it should be stressed that the influence of France, especially in the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, was decisive, in this as in other areas of literature. Thus, for example, certain French writers contemporary with Carroll are translated almost immediately. The most obvious cases are the Countess of Ségur and Jules Verne, both with various titles and editions, still in the nineteenth century. To these we may also add Alphonse Daudet, Hector Malot, Jean Macé... In this context, English language authors are very poorly represented: from Great Britain, in the nineteenth century, we only find *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe (1719, translated into Portuguese in 1816, but from the French) and Charles Dickens, with a short story more for adults than children, *A Christmas Carol* (1843, translated into Portuguese in 1873). There is no sign of Swift,

Stevenson, Louisa May Alcott or Lewis Carroll. Although various figures from Portuguese culture and literature emphasise the virtues of English literature for the younger reader, namely Eça de Queirós (1905), who lived in England for some years and Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho (1880), the truth is that their enthusiasm did not fall on fertile ground or lead to the appearance of translated works from that country.

In terms of literary production by Portuguese authors, the most significant approximation to Lewis Carroll's book comes in 1942 with a work by the writer Virgínia de Castro e Almeida. In the preface to her book *História de Dona Redonda e da sua Gente*, this author praises Carroll, expressing her desire to "create a work that exerts the same effect and influence over Portuguese children that Alice in Wonderland has exerted and continues to exert over those for whom it was written" (Almeida, 1971: XI). However, for an author who began her writing activity in the nineteenth century, it is curious that only some eighty years later should Alice's adventures provoke such admiration and influence her writing in this way.

The echoes of Lewis Carroll in Portugal, then, are faint echoes, given that it takes around seventy years for a (poor) translation to grow out of the fruit of his creative genius. And the example singled out is the only significant reverberation of the fantasy of Alice in Portugal, at a time when realism was emerging as the essential feature of writing for children.

A glance at the translations of *Alice*

As a result of our analysis of the different translations and versions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* made in Portugal, we can single out two basic periods: a first moment which extends from the date of the first edition, in 1936, as we have already mentioned, to 1970; and a second period that runs from the 1970s until the present day. In the first segment considered, we have only found more or less abbreviated versions of Lewis Carroll's work, published in collections explicitly intended for a readership of children and teenagers. In some extreme cases only two or three essential narrative sequences are retained, although equally, at times, elements which were not present in the original are added. This is the case of the version published by Editorial Ibis (1961), with only 12 pages dominated by illustrations; or even the cloth edition by Majora, also with 12 pages, from 1962. More recent are the volumes published by Electroliber (1975) and by Majora (1980) in the collection "Livros recortados", both with only 8 pages.

As is only to be expected, these editions do not include the extra-textual matter, namely the dedicatory preface in verse. In the more reduced versions (between 30 and 40 lines of text) that exist in both of the periods under consideration, there is no division into chapters.

Curiously, the first adaptation is published with the title *Alice no país das fadas* [Alice in Fairyland], which immediately places us in a universe quite distinct from the one we find in the story of Alice. This text is published in a collection for children ("Coleção Manecas"), directed by Henrique

Marques Júnior, also the author of this version of Lewis Carroll's book. Perhaps because this is the first appearance of the text in Portugal, this little version (46 pages) includes an introduction in which Marques Júnior makes a brief reference to the author and the genesis of the work, the characteristics of the language, and to his work as adaptor. In this ambit, he even goes so far as to beg forgiveness for having avoided the "paradoxes and absurdities" of the text, and for having "sweetened" the story. Later, under a new title, *Alice in Wonderland*, the very same text is re-edited in the same collection in 1942, 1946 and 1951, with slight alterations, namely the introduction of chapters with their respective titles. The same author is further responsible for a lengthier adaptation that is closer to the original (Guimarães Editores, 1951), although with numerous textual inconsistencies, immediately evident in the (mis)translation of the titles of the different chapters.

These and other editions included in collections explicitly destined for children, published up to the 1970s, generally display the same characteristics. As we have already pointed out, these are versions of Lewis Carroll's work that have been substantially reduced, and which include specially commissioned illustrations in black and white or in colour. None of them has the John Tenniel's drawings, which accompanied the original edition of *Alice*. The text almost always continues to preserve the division into chapters, although not all of the chapters are included, and, furthermore, episodes within chapters are eliminated. Moreover, conspicuous divergences between the different authors of these versions may be identified. If a complete translation of Alice's adventures obligatorily demands a painstaking, careful work, given the linguistic difficulties recognisably imposed by Carroll's text, those versions which condense the original text show a clear loss of quality, in all respects. Thus when dialogues and parallel reflections are abbreviated, when complete episodes are eliminated (as occurs with chapters III and V, in some editions), the richness of the text is drastically reduced, if not completely suppressed. The final result is almost always an anodyne narrative that lacks the creative charge of the original text, which allows us to raise doubts as to its interest and efficacy in respect of its tiny readers.

Now a word concerning the "second-hand" translations, in other words, the existence of translations made from versions in other languages which obviously sets up greater distance from the original text, and new inconsistencies. These are found, in this case, in the Verbo publications, with text by Maria Isabel de Mendonça Soares (1967), based on a French version, and those of the Livraria Bertand (Collection "Histórias", 1960; re-edited in 1966 and 1974). The first edition mentioned, in addition to Alice's adventures, also includes an introduction which refers to the genesis of the work – the fact that Lewis Carroll had responded to a request by Alice, to invent a story – as well as including some commentaries on the importance of fantasy, in an attempt (not very clear) to justify the "nonsensical" tone of the work. Still in this sphere, a reference to the existence of four different editions, two of which are fairly recent (1995 and 1997), deriving from the version by

Walt Disney, perhaps taking advantage of the interest shown by children for the Disney films and their wide dissemination. It should be emphasised, however, that this version shows some significant divergence from the original text, namely the beginning and end of the narrative – the dialogue between the two sisters – as well as incorporating characters from *Through the Looking Glass* (The Twins Tweedledum and Tweedledee). We end this paragraph with a note on the cartoon versions. We have found three different editions, also foreign in origin, and of poor quality.

Let us now analyse, at greater length, some texts referring to the second segment which we have considered, that is, editions dating from 1970. The justification for this second part, dating from 1970, is the appearance of the first complete translation of *Alice*. More precisely, in 1971 that text is published in an edition for adults, prefaced and commented on in detail from a psychoanalytical point of view, by Manuel João Gomes (Edições Afrodite). This is also the first time that one has had access, in a Portuguese edition, to John Tenniel's illustrations, which we will meet again in all the later translations of the whole text, with the exception of a volume published by Verbo in 1992 that opts to present illustrations made by Eric Kincaid and inspired by portraits of the figure of Alice.

Thus in this period we find the books that remain closest to the original text, whether they are included in collections aimed explicitly at a young readership or published without any indication of a specific target audience. A close reading of these different renderings immediately demonstrates remarkable textual differences between the various translations.

Looking at the editions as a whole, we find different types of faults, that range from, at worse, inadequate translation of the original terms, with flagrant and unpardonable errors that even an average reader of English will have no trouble identifying. One of the editions most widely available at present is noteworthy for certain serious mistakes. We believe that translators and publishing houses should take special care to avoid this kind of occurrence. Then, we note some questionable, if not incomprehensible translation options, especially in textual fragments that do not raise any doubts. This fact sometimes leads to ridiculous situations. Sometimes wordplay is eliminated where it exists. For instance, in an edition of the Círculo de Leitores/D. Quixote, the translator corrects the "error" that Alice commits in saying "Antipathies" instead of "Antipodes", chapter I; in the Portuguese version, the translation of this latter expression is given. In the Presença edition, the mouse's tale in chapter III is translated in continuous text and not in the suggestive form of a "tail". Sometimes wordplays are added that do not exist. This is the case of the volume published by Afrodite, whose translators "play" with one of the passages in Chapter I, where Alice goes down the burrow and thinks, "Do cats eat bats? (...) Do bats eat cats?, falsifying the writing of the words in Portuguese, as if it were a mistake by Alice («"Os gatos comem morçagos?" E outras vezes: "Os morçagos comem guêtos?"»); p. 39).

Another question that is also not resolved in the most appropriate manner by the different translators involves the selection of lexis and the most correct sentence structure in Portuguese, so that the rhyme and colloquialness of the text is maintained.

The problem of translation is complicated even further by word plays that only have significance in English, as is the case of the confusion between “tail” and “tale”, in chapter III, or with the introduction of certain idiomatic expressions, or in the treatment of rhymed poems. The most popular option for the word plays has been to give explanations in footnotes. In relation to the poems, one generally finds their transposition into rhymed verse, though this solution is not systematically adopted. If in the 1971 Afrodite edition and that of Verbo new poems in rhyming verses are constructed (which on some occasions turn out well and on others leads to profound alterations in the original text), the Europa-América edition sometimes opts for rhyming verse and sometimes for blank verse. Only one edition of those currently in circulation translates all the poems into blank verse (Círculo de Leitores/D. Quixote).

Since it would be tedious to give an exhaustive list of the different problems that we have identified in the analysis carried out, we have decided to include, by way of a brief sample of these differences, an appendix with different translations of the first lines of *Alice* where it will be immediately possible to identify errors and imprecisions.

From this survey of the panorama of versions, it is possible to conclude that a good translation, as yet inexistent, will be located somewhere between the offerings of Maria das Mercês/Maria Isabel de Mendonça Soares, Portuguese author of books for children (Editorial Verbo, 1992), and Vera Azancot (Europa-América, 1977; reedited in 1993). Although each of these translations presents certain problems, we also find in these two works some of the best solutions to the translation of Lewis Carroll’s text. But the truth is that we continue to await a true accurate translation of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. Because, up to the present moment, no one has really *discovered* Alice, as the following words of the poet António José Forte, curiously, reveal (1971: 85). Which is why Alice doesn’t live in Portugal. Yet.

*Translated from the Portuguese by the editor.

Alice

*Quando Alice chegou do País das Maravilhas
e atravessou o rossio
montada num crocodilo*

*como era de calcular
ninguém a viu
e apesar de ser uma menina
era uma pessoa importante
mas não veio a notícia nos jornais
e sobretudo Alice não cheirava a gasolina*

*foi por isso talvez
que ninguém a viu
nem novos nem velhos*

*Alice atravessou o rossio
disse adeus
e entrou no País dos Espelhos*

*When Alice arrived from Wonderland
and crossed the square
riding a crocodile
as you might expect
no one saw her*

*and despite being a little girl
she was an important person
but it wasn't reported in the papers
and above all Alice didn't smell of petrol*

*perhaps that is why
no one saw her
neither young nor old*

*Alice crossed the square
said goodbye
and went into Mirrorland*

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Appendix

Texto I - Lewis Carroll

Down the Rabbit-Hole

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank and of having nothing to do: once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, “and what is the use of a book,” thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?”

Texto II - Henrique Marques Júnior, Lisboa: Guimarães Editores, 1952, 190p.

A toca do coelho branco

Alice principiou a aborrecer-se de estar há tanto tempo sentada no banco junto de sua irmã, sem nada ter que fazer; uma ou duas vezes olhou para o livro que a irmã lia, mas o livro não tinha bonecos nem diálogos.

- Que graça tem um livro sem bonecos nem diálogos? - pensava Alice.

Texto III - José Vaz Pereira/Manuel João Gomes, Lisboa: Afrodite, 1971, 275p.

No buraco dum coelho

Começava Alice a estar farta de estar sentada à beira-rio com a irmã, sem ter nada que fazer: já tinha espreitado não sei quantas vezes para o livro que a irmã estava a ler e que não tinha nem gravuras nem diálogos. “Mas para que é que serve um livro - pensou Alice - sem desenhos nem conversas?”

Texto IV - Vera Azancot, Mem Martins: Europa-América, 1977, 143p.

Descida à toca do coelho

Alice estava a começar a ficar farta de estar sentada ao lado da irmã na margem do rio e de não ter nada que fazer: já tinha dado uma olhadela, uma vez por outra, no livro que a irmã estava a ler, mas este não tinha ilustrações nem diálogos; “e para que serve um livro,” pensou ela, “se não tem bonecos nem diálogos?”

Texto V - Carlos Grifo Babo, Lisboa: Presença, 1986, 117p.

Pela toca do coelho abaixo

Alice começava a ficar mais que farta de estar ali sentada ao lado da irmã, na margem do rio, sem ter nada que fazer. Por uma ou duas vezes, deitara uma espreitadela ao livro que a irmã estava a ler, mas era um livro sem gravuras nem diálogo “e para que serve um livro”, pensou Alice, “onde não há gravuras nem diálogo?”

Texto VI - Maria Filomena Duarte, Lisboa: Círculo de Leitores, 1986, 141p.; Lisboa: D. Quixote, 1988, 141p.

Na toca do coelho

Alice começava a sentir-se muito cansada por estar sentada no banco, ao lado da irmã, e por não ter nada que fazer. Mais do que uma vez espreitara para o livro que a irmã estava a ler, mas este não tinha gravuras nem conversas... “E para que serve um livro que não tem gravuras nem conversas?”, pensou Alice.

Texto VI - Maria das Mercês e Maria Isabel de Mendonça Soares, Lisboa: Verbo, 1994, 108p.

Na toca do coelho

Alice começava a sentir-se farta de estar sentada ao lado da irmã à beira do rio, e ainda para mais sem ter nada que fazer; por uma ou duas vezes dera uma espreitadela ao livro que a irmã estava a ler, mas não tinha bonecos nem diálogos. “E para que serve um livro”, pensava Alice, “sem bonecos nem diálogos?”