

LEWIS CARROLL'S ADVENTURES IN PORTUGAL*

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1. Much has been written about the spell that *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* has cast and continues to cast over children and adults, and about the innumerable aspects that have made this work a true "classic" of literature for all ages, elements that have, moreover, given rise to the most varied critical approaches. One hundred and thirty three years after the publication of the book, and on the hundredth anniversary of the death of its author, the purpose of this essay, above all informative in nature, is to pay homage to the genius of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson/Lewis Carroll, referring, in passing, to particular aspects of his influence on children's literature and drawing attention to the main translations of his work that are available in Portugal today.

2. A survey of the first general bibliography of children's books published in Portugal (Marques Júnior, 1928) reveals that before 1928, there is no information concerning the publication of any of Lewis Carroll's works in our country. Nevertheless, it is more than likely that his name was known in Portuguese literary circles at the turn of the century.

As we shall see, it can be stated with certainty that one of the most outstanding Portuguese writers of children's books, Virgínia de Castro e Almeida, knew and valued *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*. The first children's stories by this author were published at the end of the nineteenth century and her literary production in the years preceding the establishment of the Republic in 1910 still exalts in realist narratives the values of progress and work that are typical of the Republican ideology of the period. However, in the second phase of her work, Virgínia de Castro e Almeida chooses to follow the path of humour and imagination, which is reflected in two fundamental books, published with tremendous success in the 1940s: *História de Dona Redonda e da sua gente* [The Story of Mrs Round and her Folk] (1942), and *Aventuras de Dona Redonda* [Mrs Round's Adventures] (1943). These works narrate the fantastic experiences lived by Dona Redonda and Dona Maluka [Mrs Crazy], two charming but bizarre ladies, and their "folk": children, animals and strange beings. It is precisely in the preface to the first of these books that we will encounter a striking tribute to Lewis Carroll and an acknowledgement of the influence that his work exerted on the *História de Dona Redonda*:

We, the Latin races, so skilled in the witty saying or the word play, have difficulty in understanding humour, that magic wand that touches simple and robust souls and sets off the beautiful firework of laughter without malice.

Alice in Wonderland and *Through the Looking Glass* are the Revelation of the young, the memory of which will remain with their readers for the rest of their lives, whose meaning will later emerge, little by little. They are two enchanted towers, like the enchanted tower of life itself, where new windows open as if by magic, dispelling shadows, unveiling secrets, as people climb up.

Perhaps I may be accused of imitating Carroll in this book. No, not imitating. Thanks be to God, I have never imitated anyone. But I confess that I have aspired 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.

The *História de Dona Redonda* is an essay in humour well within the grasp of Latin children; it is also an essay in strong, stimulating and hard principles, adapted to these modern times in which life takes an unexpected turn and the struggles are now different from those that were waged not long ago. Almeida, 1971: XI).

One obviously detects in these words of Virgínia de Castro e Almeida signs of her ideological shift to the right following the establishment of Salazar's dictatorship, especially in the reference to "strong, stimulating and hard principles, adapted to these modern times" which pervade the *História de Dona Redonda*. Nevertheless, the book deserves attention and may at some future time awaken the curiosity of researchers interested in studying the intertextual dialogue between certain works of Portuguese children's literature and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

It will not have escaped the attentive reader of this literature that high fantasy and nonsense are far from constituting dominant features of the

poetics of twentieth-century Portuguese authors. Some exceptions can be noted, however, above all from the 1970s onwards, with some authors resorting, more frequently, to nonsense. Among those voices it is only right to single out Luísa Ducla Soares (*Poemas da mentira... e da verdade*, 1983, and *A Gata Tareca e outros poemas levados da breca*, 1990), José Fanha (*A porta*, 1990) and, in some of their texts, Mário Castrim, Ramiro S. Osório and Sérgio Godinho. However, the most Carrollian of our writers of children's literature is perhaps Manuel António Pina.

This author has inherited from the Anglo-Saxon and the Surrealist traditions the taste for nonsense, combining it with an intelligent irreverence and an appreciation of irony, paradox and word play which do not preclude the creative exploitation of the ambiguities and ludic aspects of the language. These features have gone some way towards individualising some of the most original writing in Portugal at the present time, taking in the short story for children (*O País das Pessoas de Pernas para o Ar*, 1973); *Gigões e Anantes*, 1974; *O Têpluquê*, 1976); theatre (*A Guerra do Tabuleiro de Xadrez; História com Reis e Rainhas Bobos Bombeiros e Galinhas; Os Dois Ladrões*, 1983; *O Inventão*, 1987); poetry (*O Pássaro da Cabeça*, 1983); and the teenage novel: *Os Piratas*, of 1986.

Furthermore, Manuel António Pina has openly acknowledged in various interviews and public speeches his "debt" to the author of *The Hunting of the Snark* –which perhaps explains why he was the writer chosen to author the preface to the Portuguese version of *The wasp in a wig – a "suppressed" episode of Through the Looking Glass and What Alice found there*, published in 1992 under the title of *O vespão de peruca* (Lisbon & Etc.) translated by Vera Pinto and Luís Manuel Gomes. In this preface, the author expresses his "gratuitous and ambiguous love for the *Alices*", confessing himself to be a "Carroll junky" (Pina, 1992: 12 and 7). The talking animals, the fantastic characters and the child figures of Manuel António Pina's children's stories and plays, above all in *Gigões e anantes*, *O Têpluquê* and *O Inventão*, are, effectively, Carrollian. The same may be said of the dialogues between characters and the way that problems of logic and certain contradictions in everyday life sometimes rise to the surface. The linguistic creativeness of the texts and the many questions raised concerning the reliability of language constitute other distinctive features of this work, in which the influence of Carroll can be detected. We could almost apply to Manuel António Pina what Nelly Novaes Coelho wrote about the author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, that one of his great literary discoveries "was to have succeeded in breaking away from the equilibrium of the Real, starting with its linguistic representation. Exactly what makes values endure, by inscribing them in the laws, rules and customs of each period" (Coelho, 1982: 316).

3. According to all the evidence –writes Nelly Novaes Coelho– the invention of language or linguistic subversion has been one of the great obstacles to the appearance of a great number of translations which remain faithful to the original” (Coelho, 1982: 314). These same difficulties have been experienced by the different Portuguese translators of *Alice*, as can be seen from the main versions currently available in the market.

Vera Azancot is responsible for those published by Publicações Europa-América –*Alice no País das Maravilhas* (Mem Martins, 1977) and *Alice do outro lado do espelho* (Mem Martins, 1978)– both with the subtitle “a book for great and small” and in paperback format. In hardback and with the same titles, the translations of Maria Filomena Duarte appeared in 1988, under the impress of Publicações Dom Quixote, in Lisbon. It should also be added that by the beginning of the 1970s, Editorial Estampa had already published a version of *Through the Looking Glass* in its prestigious collection of fantasy literature “Livro B”, with the usual title of *Alice do outro lado do espelho* (Lisbon, 1971). In this latter instance, responsibility for the translation belongs to three names: Yolanda Artigas, Nina Videira and Luís Lobo. With the exception of the Estampa edition, all the others reproduce John Tenniel’s original illustrations. Of an acceptable standard, and including the indispensable “translator’s notes”, these translations do not reveal any especially noteworthy aspects. In all of these, any translational problems that have not been resolved have been substituted.

Also to be mentioned is the publication in 1993 of *The Nursery Alice*, with the Portuguese title of *Alice para os mais pequenos* (Lisbon, Vega) where we find once again, in colour, the illustrations of John Tenniel. The translation was made by Manuela Agostinho, and the edition includes an abridged version of the introduction that Martin Gardner prepared in 1996 for the Dover Publications edition.

With the title *Aventuras de Alice no País das Maravilhas* (Lisbon, Presença, 1986), and, once again, with Tenniel’s illustrations, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was published in 1986 in a translation which deserves special mention since the translator Carlos Grifo Babo took the trouble to write an introductory note which reads as follows: “In the present translation, one has attempted, and in many cases, succeeded in finding the correspondence in Portuguese for [the] multiple [word plays]. Some of these, however, resist translation so strongly that it becomes necessary to explain them. And as these explanations are indispensable if one is to understand the text that follows, we have decided to incorporate them into the actual narrative, in italics and between dashes, like a parenthesis” (Babo, 1993: 8).

We believe the translation has quality and, although it is open to debate, the translator’s option does avoid the habitual footnotes regarding untranslatable word plays. Thus, in the most problematic moments, Carlos Grifo Babo’s elucidations, inserted in italics into the body of the text, almost function as explanatory continuations of the narrator’s discourse. However,

this is a procedure that many will question and which essentially reinforces the status of “children’s book” attributed to Lewis Carroll’s work.

Finally, we should like to discuss the most interesting of the Portuguese editions of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* to have appeared in the last three decades: *Aventuras de Alice no País das Maravilhas*, published in Lisbon by Fernando Ribeiro de Mello / Edições Afrodite, in 1971.

In the first place, it should be noted that this was published by what was, in the 1970s, one of the most stimulating Portuguese publishing houses, Afrodite, directed by Fernando Ribeiro de Mello, whose editorial project was characterised initially by the high graphic and literary quality of the majority of works he published. Daring and irreverence were also brand images of this publishing house which for that very reason saw its books banned and seized in the last years of Salazar and Marcello Caetano’s dictatorial regime, in other words, until the 25 April of 1974, the date that marked Portugal’s return to democracy.

The *Alice* published by Edições Afrodite reveals particular characteristics that fit in with the image to which the publishing house had accustomed us. With an attractive graphic design by José Marques de Abreu, this edition is clearly aimed at an adult readership: the various chapters of the work are interspersed with interpretative comments of a psychoanalytical bent that set out above all to explore the erotic dimension hidden in *Alice*. The book reproduces the original manuscript of comments made by one of the translators, the writer and theatre critic Manuel José Gomes. In the lengthy “Introduction or Foyer”, Gomes states: “Charles Dodgson wrote-dreamed [...] this book of love, expelled for ever from the literatures of Universal History. [...] *The Adventures of Alice* are an ugly dream. Difficult to recount. Badly written – a dream of love with love made to a ten-year old girl. For this reason, too, because this is an attempt to relate a dream, it is an invented writing which does not need to be difficult. The dream ends by giving birth to a precise language, in which the Mathematician of Oxford does his work (...) Einstein *avant la lettre*. Or disguising with numbers the act being practised” (Gomes, 1971: 16 and 20).

The translation published by Edições Afrodite was the joint responsibility of José Vaz Pereira and Manuel João Gomes, and would also be published in Brazil, in 1976. The interpretative comments include observations pertaining to the punning games and other aspects of Carroll’s discourse that are more difficult to turn into Portuguese. It is not our task to evaluate this version, since we are not experts in translation problems. Nevertheless we should state that despite some criticisms levelled against the solutions found – Nelly Novaes Coelho (1982: 316) finds them less creative than those of the Brazilian version by Sebastião Uchoa Leite – the overall high quality of J. Vaz Pereira and M. J. Gomes’ work is commonly praised in Portugal, where, regrettably, the edition is no longer in print and Afrodite has ceased its publishing activity.

As a final note, we shall merely add that nowadays it is possible to read, in Portuguese, a magnificent version of *The Hunting of the Snark* (*A*

caça ao Snark, Porto: Afrontamento, 1985), authored by the poet and translator Manuel Resende, with wonderful illustrations by Maria Antónia Pestana. This artist was also responsible for the excellent graphic design of the work, which draws on Henry Holiday's engravings for the first English edition. For his part, the writer and journalist Miguel Esteves Cardoso has written the preface to a selection of letters to girls written by Carroll and translated by Mário Avelar as *Meninas: cartas e fotografias* (Lisbon: Assírio e Alvim, 1994). The letters were selected from the compilation published in 1982 by Morton N. Cohen under the title *The Selected Letters of Lewis Carroll*. The Portuguese edition is illustrated with photographs and includes a chronology of the author's life and works.

4. In the light of what has been said above, it can be stated that in Portugal, the writings of Lewis Carroll are still alive, and we are certain that the number of his readers will increase, thanks to the various translations available in the market, whether of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* or of *Through the Looking Glass*, to which should be added the Portuguese versions of the other works we have also mentioned in this article. On the other hand, even if the nonsense and the high fantasy of Nordic origins cannot be seen as a fundamental element of our children's literature, Carroll's influence on some Portuguese authors, like Virgínia de Castro e Almeida, Manuel António Pina and others, is very real.

To read the work of Lewis Carroll, to translate it and engage in a creative dialogue with it through new literary texts seems to us the best way to pay homage to the author – a path that is being followed in Portugal, as we have attempted to demonstrate.

*Translated from the Portuguese by the editor.

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