

**ERRING WITH PRÉVERT:
COMMENTARY ON BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE
TRANSLATIONS OF “MEA CULPA” BY SILVIANO
SANTIAGO AND MÁRIO LARANJEIRA**

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Abstract: The present article reviews two Brazilian Portuguese translations of French poet Jacques Prévert’s poem “Mea Culpa”, by Silviano Santiago and Mário Laranjeira; it also comments on Laranjeira’s criticism of Santiago’s translation. Both the commentary on their translations and the commentary on Laranjeira’s criticism draw upon Antoine Berman’s concepts of *translation position* and *translation project* (1995). In light of these concepts, it is possible to see that, apart from the theoretical and analytical soundness of Laranjeira’s commentary, his criticism of Santiago’s translation does not take the latter’s translation project into account, and therefore disregards his translation emphases and commitments. Finally, a third translation is proposed, not as substitute to its forerunners, but as their continuator, and as one more link in a continuous chain of retranlations.

Keywords: Jacques Prévert. Silviano Santiago. Mário Laranjeira. Mea Culpa. Translation criticism.

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ERRANDO COM PRÉVERT: COMENTÁRIO ÀS TRADUÇÕES DE “MEA CULPA” DE SILVIANO SANTIAGO E MÁRIO LARANJEIRA

Resumo: O presente artigo se propõe a comentar as traduções para o português do Brasil do poema “Mea Culpa”, do poeta francês Jacques Prévert, realizadas por Silvano Santiago e Mário Laranjeira, bem como comentar a crítica feita por Laranjeira à tradução de Santiago. Tanto o comentário às traduções quanto à crítica de Laranjeira embasam-se nos conceitos de *posição tradutória* e *projeto de tradução* de Antoine Berman (1995). Tendo em vista estes conceitos, é possível constatar que, independentemente da pertinência da análise que Laranjeira faz do poema, sua crítica à tradução de Santiago ignora o projeto tradutório deste, e portanto suas ênfases e compromissos ao traduzir. Ao final, uma terceira tradução do poema é proposta, não como alternativa às anteriores, mas como continuadora destas e da cadeia de retraduições.

Palavras-chave: Jacques Prévert. Silvano Santiago. Mário Laranjeira. Mea Culpa. Crítica de traduções.

In 1985, Brazilian critic Silvano Santiago selected, prefaced and translated a number of poems by French poet Jacques Prévert (1900-77), among which he included the small “Mea Culpa”. In 1996, Brazilian translator and critic Mário Laranjeira would publish in French an article in which he commented Santiago’s rendering of “Mea Culpa”, and proposed an educated retranslation; English and Brazilian Portuguese translations of Laranjeira’s article would become available in 2012, when Brazilian journal *Estudos Avançados* included them in its 26th issue—a special number on poetic translation.

I should like to provide a treble contribution to Laranjeira’s critical exercise by commenting on both translations of “Mea Culpa”, expanding on Laranjeira’s comments and offering a third translation of the same poem. I will initially explain Laranjeira’s view and summarize his analysis of Santiago’s translation (section 1); an expanded analysis of “Mea Culpa” will follow (section 2), which will lead to an interpretation of the poem (section 3); both translations will then be reviewed anew (sections 4 to 6): Santiago’s

translation will be reappraised (section 4), as will Laranjeira's translation and criticism (sections 5 and 6); at last, a third translation will be proposed, and its project exposed (section 7). Antoine Berman's concepts of *translation position* and *translation project* (1995) will guide critique to translator, translations and Laranjeira's translation criticism.

1. Laranjeira's analysis: sense and significance

Mea culpa¹

C'est ma faute
C'est ma faute
C'est ma très grande faute d'orthographe
Voilà comment j'écris
Giraffe.
(Jacques PRÉVERT)

*

Errei
Errei
Que enorme erro de ortografia
Eis como escrevi
Girrafa
(trad. Silvano SANTIAGO [1985, 39])²

*

Minha culpa
Minha culpa
Minha máxima culpa em ortografia
Vejam como escrevi
Bassia
(trad. Mário LARANJEIRA [1996/2012, 33])³

In “Meaning and significance in poetic translation” (1996/2012), Laranjeira made structural comments about Prévert’s poem and its translation by Santiago, which fostered his own retranslation. His starting point is a distinction between *vehicular texts*—meaning and reference-focused texts, the translation of which would demand strict attention to meaning (1996/2012. p.29)—and *poetic texts*—signifier-centered texts, imbued with what Riffaterre (1983) calls *significance*:

Significance is responsible for opening the meaning to multiple readings, all of them plausible, and this is one of the trademarks of the poetic text [...]. Riffaterre (1983 p.13ss.) reserves the term meaning for the information provided by the mimetic text, and uses the term significance to designate this formal and semantic unit that contains the levels of obliquity (1996/2012, p.30).

In a way, significance determines the goals and method of poetic translation:

The translator of a poem should thus have before his text an attitude quite different from that of the translator of a vehicle text. While the latter translates especially the meaning, the former must, in his rewriting operation, *pass on to his text the specific significance of the original poem*, which is its identification card.

But as the translator’s activity *always begins with reading*, this reader-writer must *take into account all these facts that are observable and identifiable as responsible for the semantic obliquity of the poem*, i.e., the textual markers of significance, and work to recover them in the text he produces (p.30, emphases added).

We can say with Berman (1995) that Laranjeira explicitly indicates the *translation position* (i.e. how he views translation) and the *translation project* (i.e. how he wishes to translate) upon which he will base his retranslation of “Mea Culpa”. As will become evident later, it is motivated by the perceived flaws in Santiago’s rendering.

Let us briefly review the main points of Laranjeira’s analysis in his quest for recovering the poem’s significance:

The title of the poem is a **textual interpretant* in that it refers to the *Confiteor*, a prayer which is part of the Christian tradition and that in each language-culture has a canonical, official formula, a fixed form. Prévert reproduces verbatim part of the canonical text in French: “C’est ma faute, c’est ma faute, c’est ma très grande faute.” We are immersed, through this interpretant, **in the isotopy of the Christian ritual*, of sin and forgiveness... But to the reader’s surprise, right in the middle of the poem there is a rupture caused by the dual sign *faute*, which although belonging to the isotopy of religion casts us, by its determinant “*d’orthographe*”, **in the isotopy of the “school”* in which the entire sequence of the text is situated. The mode of expansion of the matrix or the grammar of significance is therefore focused on a textual interpretant (*Confiteor*) and on a dual sign (*faute*). (1996/2012, pp.32-3, *emphases added.)

He says the following of Santiago’s rendering:

The translated text entirely lost the poeticity of the original for the simple reason that **the translator was unable to maintain the grammar of significance*, i.e., in the target text the textual interpretant, which would be the canonical text of the *Confiteor* in English (“My fault, my fault, my most grievous fault ...”), and the dual sign disappear[ed]. (Id. p.33, *emphasis added.)

He also comments his own retranslation in contrast with Santiago's:

Thus, in addition to maintaining the interpretant and the shift from the isotopy of "religion" to the isotopy of "school", some other elements of significance such as the rhythm of the original and the primacy of the material element of the sign over the concept can also be maintained. Undoubtedly, by translating "giraffe" ("girrafe" [sic] Santiago's translation) for "bassia" (literally "cuvette" or "bassin" in French; basin in English), I did something totally inconceivable in pragmatic translation but perfectly plausible in poetic translation.

Indeed, when Prévert chose the word "giraffe" to end his text, **he did not do it because of its semantic components [...]*, but for two specific reasons: first for the phonic recurrence (*orthographe/giraffe*) and then because the double consonant "f" in that word is at the level of spelling only, with no phonic or phonemic consequence.

It is the same with the word "bassia" (whose correct spelling in Portuguese is "bacia"), which rhymes with "ortografia" and contains a strictly spelling error. **Only the material elements of the word were considered.* Well, Santiago's option, by attempting to maintain the conceptual elements of "girafe" (*girafa* in Portuguese) lost the phonic recurrence and **added a phonetics error to the spelling error*: in Portuguese the intervocalic "rr" (double "r") is pronounced differently from the intervocalic "r" (single "r") (pp.33-4, **emphases added*).

Laranjeira's take on the poem may be summarized as comprising the following features: (1) INTERTEXTUAL: the poem is majorly composed of a previous text, religious and formulaic in nature, which is repeated verbatim in its French translation. (2) SEMANTIC:

two semantic fields overlap, those of *sin* and *school*, due to the double meaning of ^{FR} *faute* (fault, mistake). (3) PHONOLOGICAL: ^{FR} *orthographe* and ^{FR} *girafe*, respectively ending lines three and five, rhyme. (4) ORTHOGRAPHIC: ^{FR} *girafe* is intentionally misspelled as ^{FR} *giraffe*. (5) LEXICAL: ^{FR} *girafe* was chosen solely on the basis of its phonological properties, its meaning being irrelevant. (6) SYNTACTIC: ^{FR} *d'orthographe* is appended as post-modifier to the noun phrase ^{FR} *ma très grande faute*. The most evident translational consequence of the above is that (1) and (2) must be preserved exactly as they are; the greatest obstacle thereto is that Portuguese does not have a word with the exact double meaning of ^{FR} *faute*.

Other formal features are also of note. There must be rhyme between lines three and five; our usual translational *modus operandi* does not strictly demand that it be between ^{BP} *ortografia* and ^{BP} *girafa* (an impossible demand), so the semantic component need not be isomorphically aligned to the syntactic one. There is, however, need of lexical items which would conform to both the semantic and the syntactic levels while allowing for the orthographic one as well.

Finally, unless an interpretation of the poem is provided that demands the semantic component of ^{FR} *girafe*, only its phonological and orthographic elements need be maintained: a rhyming word must be found which would invite a rather common spelling mistake.

2. Beyond Laranjeira's analysis

Before commenting on the two translations and proposing a third one, I should like to expand on Laranjeira's analysis in order to reach an interpretation of the poem. I will both add new elements and enhance those he already discussed.

(7) REGISTER: Laranjeira says nothing about register⁴. For readers sufficiently acquainted with the religious intertext, there is a sudden shift in register, switching from *religious and formal* to *school-talk* (which is lower in formality, because it belongs to common knowledge and to the talk of children): ^{FR} *faute* belongs

to both registers, and is therefore responsible for their transitional overlapping. From then, ^{FR} *voilà comment j'écris* in line four may sound rather informal and everyday-like, in spite of ^{FR} *voilà* phrases belonging to written and oral language⁵. The poem, as a consequence, seems to wander among at least three different levels of formality, there being at least one sudden breach.

(8) SEMANTIC (2): Even though Laranjeira's article does not state this, he was probably aware of the fact that post-modifier ^{FR} *d'orthographe* is responsible for activating both the shift in register and the semantic ambiguity of ^{FR} *faute*. Also, shifts in register are isomorphically not aligned to semantic shifts. In the poem, ^{FR} *giraffe* is metalanguage; however, it would be impossible for any reader familiar with the word to simply dismiss its meaning. The poem does, consequently, move in the end to a third, completely random semantic field (Christianity—school—zoology), which leads to a new sudden shift.

(9) PHONOLOGICAL (2): Post-modifier ^{FR} *d'orthographe* rhythmically extends the religious formula (which should probably receive a rather stiff reading, due to its being usually performed in a public ceremony; such reading would be less prone to the type of idiosyncratic variation taking place in individual poem-reading).

(10) LEXICAL (2): Just as the *Confiteor* segment, ^{FR} *faute d'orthographe* is a fixed expression in French, which does confer it a formulaic character as well. Thus ^{FR} *faute* allows for the transition from one long religious formulaic passage to a brief technical phrase.

(11) MORPHOSYNTACTIC: The simple present verb ^{FR} *j'écris* may indicate both an action just completed and a reiterated action—in this case, a recurrent spelling mistake.

Translational problems deepen as the analysis evolves: thematic shifts cause the poem to sound slightly playful and comic; these are partially isomorphic to register shifts. The translation would be expected to follow a similar path. The aforementioned ambiguity in ^{FR} *faute* is, as we can see, even more serious than Laranjeira had imagined: semantic overlapping happens in a lexical item which

belongs to two different formulaic expressions—which correspond to ^{BP} *minha máxima culpa* e ^{BP} *erro de ortografia*. Also, Laranjeira pays little attention to the role of the post-modifier, which is the true responsible for the powerful overlap—without the post-modifier, no additional sense of ^{FR} *faute* would have been activated, nor would there be intertextual, rhythmical and diaphasic cues to the added meaning⁶.

3. Beyond Laranjeira's analysis: interpreting “Mea Culpa”

Laranjeira does not translate from an *interpretation* of the poem, only from its analysis. The shift from Christian soteriology to schoolyard talk certainly invites potentially disturbing contrasts, which would be enlightening to address. There is considerable difference between minding one's own salvation by reflexive analysis of one's conduct (this is, I believe, the expected effect a piece such as the *Confiteor*) and minding a simple spelling mistake; notwithstanding, religion and spelling are shown to be curiously similar when approximated. As I said earlier, ^{BP} *erro de ortografia* (spelling mistake) belongs to the repertoire of fixed phrases, just as ^{BP} *minha máxima culpa* to the formulaic repertoire of Christian liturgy. A spelling mistake is but (unintentional) lack of attention to convention in writing, which seldom produces any serious consequence. Prévert's ^{FR} *giraffe* and Laranjeira's ^{BP} *bassia* do not hinder comprehension—perhaps not even Santiago's ^{BP} *girrafa*, which indeed changes spelling in rather unusual ways, but his own choice will be discussed later—, nor do I believe they would, even if the spelling mistakes in poem and translations had not been cued as lyrically intentional.

Real spelling mistakes are unintentional and morally neutral, and can only be considered mistakes from the point of view of convention: ^{BP} *bacia* might as well have been established as ^{BP} *bassia*; ^{EN} *giraffe*, as the *OED* shows, comes from French, which probably means ^{FR} *girafe* may have been spelled with *ff*, if incidentally. It is

convention—an artificial but naturalized rule—that is the source of errors, but speakers and writers are those who are held accountable for them, and are liable to value judgment on their grasp of language when mistakes (especially simple ones) occur.

Are we then being invited to compare Christian *guilt* with spelling *mistakes*? Conventionality in the latter certainly may hint at the conventionality of the former; thus the sudden shifts the poem undergoes from grave to everyday-like to random (how on earth would a giraffe fit in there?) and the ensuing comic effect would destabilize the seriousness of Christian confession of guilt.

The Morphosyntactic element also plays a role here: as noted, French simple present may point both to a single instance and to a reiterated event. In his own *mea culpa*, the poetic subject may be speaking of how he normally writes, of a spelling habit, but, instead of explaining himself (e.g. “I normally write ^{FR} *girafe* with *ff*”) and self-correcting, he consciously replicates his mistake once more. Would he be willing to repent? Or is he openly defying convention? How would his spelling defiance project onto the religious universe he invoked, and which caused him to speak so gravely of something so trivial?

This interpretation reflects very relevantly on translation. The central issue of the poem would become the destabilization of Christian discourse by comparison to the equally conventional and rather trivial universe of orthography. The poem ends with a random semantic shift, when a word is selected by its phonological and orthographic properties. As I view it, the final form of the poem should be subordinated to the comico-contrastive operation of destabilizing, which takes place when these two fields are approximated.

4. Reappraising the translations of “Mea Culpa”

The above expansion on Laranjeira’s comments may help us reassess both translations.

Santiago does weaken the Catholic intertext, whereas Laranjeira takes pains to maintain it. This may bear less heavily on the final quality of both translations than Laranjeira assumes. First of all, is it really true that Santiago *completely* destroys the intertext? How much of it should be minimally preserved in order for the source-text intertext to be a part of the translation? Wouldn't the Latin title *Mea culpa* (which both poem and translations share) suffice? Would it not be enough to trigger the contrastive effect above discussed? Santiago's translation dwells far more on spelling than on religion, but the Latin title, taken as textual interpretant as Laranjeira suggests, may do the job: in light of the Latin title, ^{BP} *errei* and ^{BP} *enorme erro* may at least sound initially ambiguous and falsely lead the reader to expect a confession of sin. Each translation has his own agenda: the religious intertext is less relevant to Santiago, a mere hint, but it can't honestly be said to be completely absent from his translation, thanks to non-translation—the simplest translation technique, used both by Prévert in his poem and Laranjeira in his translation to render the title.

Simply hinting at religion seems to become Santiago's more uniformly informal tone—which is slightly upset by his use of ^{BP} *eis* and his omission of first-person pronoun ^{BP} *eu* (which, in this case, would be typical of written, not oral speech). His tone also becomes the surprise caused by a punctual mistake (his simple past ^{BP} *escrevi*, rendering ^{FR} *j'écris* instead of simple present ^{BP} *escrevo*, defines his spelling mistake as a one-time occurrence). In fact, Santiago seems to invert registers, being informal in the first three lines and rather solemn in the fourth. He does nonetheless seem to use at least one register shift similar to Prévert's in effect.

Santiago's translation omits rhyming altogether; Laranjeira believes him to have ignored or distorted the phonological-orthographic features of ^{FR} *girafe*, which Santiago (erroneously) translates based on meaning. That may be true according to Laranjeira's analysis, but his own take on the poem may prevent him from seeing the positive side of Santiago's translation choices.

I believe the poetic strength of Santiago's rendering to rest precisely on his ^{BP} *girrafa*. He may have disregarded the formal aspects of Prévert's French, but has aptly manipulated those of his own Portuguese. ^{BP} *Girrafa* is a truly poetic word, in more than one sense: the potentially impossible mistake opens new semantico-associative possibilities enriching the word and emphasizing its absurdity (in passing, we saw that the randomness of ^{FR} *girafe* was disregarded in Laranjeira's analysis). Portuguese digraph *rr* and its corresponding phoneme recur in four out of five lines: ^{BP} *errei*, ^{BP} *errei*, ^{BP} *erro*, ^{BP} *girrafa*, in lines one, two, three and five, respectively; it recurs in words syllabically and accentually similar: the digraph *rr* happens in the beginning of the second syllable on all four words, and belongs to the stressed syllable in both ^{BP} *er-rêi* and ^{BP} *gir-rá-fa*. The final word, bearing the unlikely mistake, is thus phonologically associated with the Portuguese words *meaning* "mistake"—a refined phonological trick, compensating for the absence of rhyme. On the semantic level, ^{BP} *girrafa* resembles a portmanteau word, a combination of ^{BP} *girafa* and ^{BP} *garrafa* (bottle). Quaintness and randomness are thus deliciously promoted to absurdity.

5. Laranjeira's translational shortcomings

Laranjeira's translation of "Mea Culpa" owes its strong points to its high degree of coherence with his analysis of Prévert's poem; its soundness notwithstanding, the same analysis is responsible for the translations' shortcomings.

First of all, by ignoring the importance of register in his analysis⁷, he composed a rather homogeneous piece, which is therefore deprived of the humorous effect the sudden shifts brought about. His ^{BP} *vejam como escrevi* unmistakably belongs to written Portuguese; his verb choice, ^{BP} *ver*, is also more formal than the available ^{BP} *olhar* (both meaning virtually the same in this case, "to look"), and less used than the latter in situations when one wants to call attention to something.

Also, Laranjeira's scrupulous concern with the *Confiteor* may be critically justified, but caused him to indulge in questionable translation choices. As noted earlier, Prévert juxtaposes two fixed expressions—the *Confiteor* text and ^{FR} *faute d'ortographe*—; Laranjeira renders the latter as ^{BP} *culpa em ortographia* (guilt in orthography). This is doubly strange: spelling is no matter for guilt, and his use of preposition ^{BP} *em* (in), motivated by his use of ^{BP} *culpa* (guilt) instead of ^{BP} *erro* (mistake), sounds alien to Portuguese usage. Thus the central sequence of the poem according to the critic's analysis, the one sequence in which semantic fields overlap and transition, is the one to have been *ungrammatically* rendered (here meaning “unintentionally anomalous sequence”, as opposed to Laranjeira's use of *ungrammaticality*, which refers to intentional deviations from language norms on any level).

6. Laranjeira's critical shortcomings and Santiago's translation project

Discussing the feud between critic Nelson Ascher and translator Paulo Vizioli concerning the translation of a poem by John Donne, translation critic Rosemary Arrojo (1993) rightly states that both critics and translators are “faithful” not to the text they comment/translate, but to their *interpretations* of them. One of the central problems in translation criticism is the fact that, as interpretation may vary from translator to translation critic, the *translated object* (i.e. the translator's interpretation) does not correspond to the *tertium comparationis* (i.e. the critic's interpretation) upon which criticism is based.

Laranjeira's translation is supported by the conceptual dichotomies *vehicular text x poetic text* and *meaning x significance*; these give his translational work a high level of coherence, in spite of the limitations just noted. When I say his ^{BP} *culpa em ortografia* is anomalous, I try to do it based on *his own translation project*⁸; as I see it, not only does the phrase fail to properly realize the

project, the project itself may be unfeasible: the centrality that ^{FR} *faute d'orthographe* assumes in his analysis and my own seems to render it almost untranslatable.

The same dichotomies also support Laranjeira's critique of Santiago. His critical lapse here is failing to take Santiago's own translation project into account. Santiago's above-mentioned informality and the smaller role he conferred to the *Confiteor* intertext may be connected to his take on Prévert and on translation. As for the poet, Santiago says:

Prévert's lyricism, as that of some of the Brazilian Modernist poets of 1922, comprises the *right combination of everyday life and humor*, foregrounding a small-scale vision of man in poetry. The poem brings forth what is small in man, though not what is common (PRÉVERT, 1985, p. 08, emphasis added).

Humor is central to Santiago, though absent from Laranjeira's take; so were contrast and iconoclasm:

Shifts in perspective in the presentation of historical or trivial events is the main message of Prévert's poetry. Shifts free us from massifying common sense (why would common sense always be right?) and have us face the unusual, the unthought-of, allowing us to *iconoclastically question* the fate of those who did not have the good fortune of being on the side of victorious common sense (PRÉVERT, 1985, p. 09, emphasis added).

Finally, Santiago is concerned with a very different set of intertextual relations. While Laranjeira takes pains to explain Prévert's use of the *Confiteor*, Santiago is busy rightly placing Prévert next and away from certain literary trends. We saw how he approximated

Prévert to Brazilian Modernist poets; he also wants to distance him from Surrealism:

Prévert's art, rather than being that of the surrealists (to whom some wish to attach him [...]), is closer to that of the *fauve* painters. It is an art in which primitive, naïve or childlike composition takes on violent coloring and shines forth a certain amount of lyricism (1985, p.08).

Approximation to Brazilian Modernism is quite strong, and finds its way into Santiago's translation project, centered around his concept of *double plaigiarism*:

It was not for the translator to impose to the translated text a clarifying poetic diction, but to *search the repertoire of possible dictions in his own national literature* for a fit equivalent. It was for the translator first to *master the equivalent*, that is, the poetic diction which he found fit, and only then undertake to translate.

In this sense this translator is a short-winged exegete, certainly a *double plagiarist*. He plagiarizes the translated text and plagiarizes the national poets selected as models. (1985, p.11, emphases added.)

These poets are explicitly named: "It was from 'models' such as Manuel Bandeira, Carlos Drummond de Andrade e Murilo Mendes that we sought to render Prévert's poetry into Portuguese" (1985, p. 10).

By ignoring central aspects of Santiago's translational work—his more markedly literary intertexts, his global vision of *the poet*, as opposed to a close vision of *the poem*, and the ensuing translation method—, Laranjeira criticizes Santiago from his own set of interests.

My own take on Santiago's translation sought to emphasize structural elements pertaining to his translation project, as I hope has now become evident. If my own comment on Santiago's ^{BP} *girrafa* is thought fitting, we may—based on Santiago's own project—note that his portmanteau word has accidentally approximated his Prévert to the surrealists he sought to avoid. This is, however, an idiosyncratic aspect of my commentary; it may not find favor with other critics and readers, and therefore cannot be unreservedly imputed to the translator.

7. A third translation

Mea culpa

minha culpa
minha culpa
minha ortográfica culpa
olha só como eu escrevo
xuva
(minha tradução)⁹

My own rendering of “Mea culpa” is motivated by a desire to find solutions that would better contemplate Laranjeira's and Santiago's view of the poem, as I find them to be differently focused, but not mutually excluding. It inevitably falls short of the mark, and is limited in pretty much the same way as theirs, in spite of its differences.

The intertextual material was reduced—though not as drastically as in Santiago's translation—: as I supposed a reader acquainted with the *Confiteor* would know where adjective ^{BP} *máxima* (^{FR} *très grande*, ^{EN} *most grievous*) is supposed to be, I replaced it with ^{BP} *ortográfica*. Prévert's final post-modifying rhythmical extension thus became a medial pre-modifying one, which, I believe, should call attention to the substitution of the canonic adjective. The phrase ^{BP} *ortográfica culpa* is parodic, not formulaic, which means

the double meaning of ^{FR} *faute* was not isomorphically incorporated into the translation. The proparoxytone adjective in pre-modifying position (usual in English, but not preferential in Portuguese) is in accordance with a more formal register, although it may cause the text to sound a bit pompous (which is alien to Prévert's style). The substitution is also strange, in that, as mentioned before, spelling mistakes are no matter for guilt, but the parodic aspect of the phrase may well answer for the strangeness in order to make it sound intentional. The kind of internal intertextual tension the substitution generates, and its intent strangeness make it, I believe, a more fitting solution than Laranjeira's ^{BP} *culpa em ortografia*, but I am well aware that this is a matter of taste; his own solution may be defended in terms not dissimilar from those with which I explained my own.

Line four was rendered as informally as possible, there having even recourse to what Célia Magalhães (2001 p.102) calls *normalization*—the exaggeration of target-language features in order to make the translated text sound more natural—: the accretion of ^{BP} *só* (literally “only”, but here used as an emphatic particle) generates a very common expression in Brazilian Portuguese when one wants to call attention to something: ^{BP} *olha só*. The line becomes thus ambiguous: ^{BP} *olha só* may point both to someone else's mistake or affront and to one's own deliberate act of defiance. Present simple ^{BP} *eu escrevo* was also restored. These two choices allow for a dubious attitude of the poetic subject, which may read as both surprise (mimicking Christian self-reflection) and challenge (deliberate insistence in making a mistake).

Finally, selection of ^{BP} *chuva* (rain, misspelled as *xuva*) derives from Laranjeira's comments. The challenge here was to find a word that (1) would rhyme with ^{BP} *culpa*, (2) would be liable to a trivial spelling mistake and (3) was common enough as to avoid literal comprehension problems or learned affectation¹⁰. ^{BP} *Chuva* was the closest match, although it suits restriction (1) only partially (there is assonance between ^{BP} *culpa* and ^{BP} *chuva*, not rhyme). I welcomed the partial match, because it allowed for phonological relations without

monotony: if a perfect rhyming match were found, four of the five lines would have the exact same ending; assonance does not avoid that monotonous effect altogether, but it may soften it a bit.

8. Final remarks: on translation criticism

All three translations could be said to belong to the same translational paradigm, as they all seem to share central presuppositions about translation¹¹. Together, they form a true chain of translation and retranslation, as each text is motivated by a previously existing one, or by a set of previously existing texts; together, they mutually enliven and enrich one another and the reception of their French original, and display the massive amount of problems even the most apparently unpretentious poem may bring forth in translation.

The great difficulty in aesthetically evaluating a translation—I here agree with Borges—lies in reaching non-comparative assessment¹². This may bear the heaviest on my own contribution, the last of the chain so far. Born out of an analysis of two pre-existing translations—one of which was already born out of an analysis of the first translation—, it cannot be said to have *one* original; it is a translation of Prévert's poem as seen by Santiago and Laranjeira. It is impossible for both Laranjeira's and my own rendering of "Mea Culpa" to be read autonomously; even Santiago's inaugural translation, originally published next to its original, cannot but invite comparison. They were all born under the sign of contrastiveness, and consequently under that of analytical skepticism. It would be, therefore, unfair (besides humanly and linguistically impossible) to ask any one of these translations to "perfectly render" their original (I shall not attempt to define what a "perfect rendition" would be; for the moment, we need no more than an intuitive understanding of the phrase.) If ^{BP} *olha só como eu escrevo* were a line by Bandeira, Drummond or Murilo Mendes, it might sound non-emphatically colloquial; here, as the third translation, second

retranslation, in a translational chain, born out of contrastive contact between three previously existing and mutually conversing texts, its projected spontaneity and colloquiality are checked from the start. Its very position in the translational chain may turn it into the most artificial of all versions.

On the other hand, perhaps we should not deny comparison a place in the Parnassus of aesthetic pleasures. Poetic translation may be delightful precisely because it invites contrast and comparison. If we manage to free such intellectual and aesthetic enterprises from prejudices and strive to be respectful to translator's own translational agendas, even translation errors may become pleasurable and enriching, and may be seen as gains.

Notes

1. A general note on translations into English: (1) No English translation of the French original is provided, because the poem will be commented at large, and because English semantic translations of the Brazilian translations are available. (2) The English translation of Santiago's translation is Laranjeira's—it features, at least, in the English translation of his article with no indication whatsoever of anyone else acting as translator—; citations from Laranjeira's article also come from the English version published by *Estudos avançados*. (3) The English translation of Laranjeira's translation is mine (he did not provide one), and so are the translations of the citations of Santiago's prologue to his selection of Prévert's poetry. (4) Borges's endnote citation is cited in the original—which fact I thought worth mentioning, as his writings are mostly in Spanish. A general note on foreign words appearing in the article: (1) When necessary, the languages of words and phrases will be specified as follows: bp: Brazilian Portuguese; en: English; fr: French. (2) As semantic English translations of the Brazilian Portuguese translations were provided, I will avoid reiterated translation of French and Brazilian Portuguese words, translating them only when necessary. (3) As original and translations all contain intentionally misspelled words, I will use their misspelled forms only when strictly speaking of them, otherwise maintaining their standard forms.

2. My mistake / My mistake / What a huge spelling mistake / Here is how I wrote / Girrafe (LARANJEIRA 1996/2012, p.33). A translator's note appended to the article states that this is a "free translation", and that it "has the sole purpose of helping the reader capture the idea of the source text" (id. p.36).

3. My guilt / My guilt / My most grievous guilt in spelling / See how I wrote / Bassia [basin]. (The standard English translation of the *Confiteor* uses ^{EN} *fault* for Latin *culpa*; in Brazilian Portuguese, the cognate ^{BP} *culpa* (guilt) would be more fitting. This is why I chose to depart from the standard translation of the *Confiteor* in this semantic translation.)

4. In this article he does not; however, in his book *Poética da tradução*, as Faleiros (2010 p.21) points, Laranjeira acknowledges that ^{FR} *voilà comment j'écris* belongs to an informal register, whereas ^{BP} *eis* (used by Santiago translation to render ^{FR} *voilà*) is rather formal.

5. I thank Cláudia Grijó Vilarouca for her revision of my analysis and interpretation of the French original.

6. We may ask ourselves if the post-modifier is really necessary: would the reader not be able to infer that ^{FR} *faute* in fact refers to "spelling mistake" when they reach ^{FR} *j'écris*? This would certainly change the poem's semantic density—which, as it stands, may have chosen not to count on such inferential games. This does not, however, affect the present problem.

7. As pointed earlier, he mentions register elsewhere; still, he seems to have missed the impact of register to the poem as a whole.

8. For Antoine Berman—from whom I borrow the concept of *translation project*—, a translation cannot fail its project; it is always its full realization. In many cases, the project will be but a conjectural reconstruction of something never made explicit by the translator in any direct way, which would make it impossible for anyone to find breaches in realization: critics would always have to ask themselves whether *their reconstruction* of the translation project is accurate before claiming the translation is at fault according to the project. I believe a translation project is, indeed, different from its full realization as translation, even when access to the project is only indirect and produced by the very translation in question: not being able to precisely trace the project is a real problem, but does not change the fact that conception and its realization do tend to be occasionally incompatible. In the case at study, Laranjeira was undeniably explicit, which

greatly helps us in assessing to what extent his own visions of both translation, poetry and the translated text were realized in his translation. Of course, *taste* may play a big role in critical assessment, just as much as other types of incompatibility (e.g. differing takes on poetry and translation, all of which are also part of a translation project for Berman), and greatly affect the soundness of criticism. I am aware of having taken such risks when I choose to state that Laranjeira's translation does not fully realize his project.

9. My fault / My fault / My orthographic fault / Just take a look at how I write / Xuva [rain].

10. In the process of proofreading the article for publication, I became aware of a fourth restriction: oddity. The semantic function of the literal meaning of ^{FR} *girafe* in Prévert's poem may have been properly rendered neither by Laranjeira's ^{PB} *bacia* nor by my ^{PB} *chuva*, as they would not be as alien to the Western culture in which talk of Christian guilt and spelling mistakes would happen. Santiago's solution would remain the most interesting here.

11. For example, note how similar the following assertion by Santiago is to those by Laranjeira: "Translation—as we view it—is a *reading decision* on the part of the translator. As such, translation is *exegesis of the poem*, as is critical reading, but it distances itself from critical reading in at least one crucial point. Critical reading seeks to organize, reveal and master the semantic multiplicity which is the essence of any piece of poetry, with help of both erudition and method, whereas *translation demands that the source-texts' polysemy remains polysemic in the target-text*; the latter should not unveil before the reader the enigma which is weaved into the literary text" (1985, p.11, emphases added). Polysemy and the obligation to critically reproduce it may be said to be equivalent to Laranjeira's concept of *significance* and the obligation to analytically trace it in the source-text and bring it as such to the target-text. Similar visions of poetry (based on the polysemic tension between form and meaning) and of poetic translation (responsible for analytically perceiving this tension and take it somehow to the source-text) underlie all three translations here in question.

12. "I suppose if we did not know which was the original and which was the translation, we could judge them fairly. But, unhappily, we cannot do this. And so the translator's work is always supposed to be inferior—or, what is worse, is *felt* to be inferior—even though, verbally, the rendering may be as good as the text" (2000, p.65).

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