

THE TRANSLATION TO ENGLISH OF *CONTOS DE BELAZARTE*

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Mário de Andrade was born in São Paulo, Brazil, in 1893 and, throughout his lifetime was a part of the literary and artistic scene of the city and of the nation as well. After having published *Há uma gota de sangue em cada poema*, in 1917, he was among the organizers of one of the most expressive artistic movements in Brazil in 1922, the *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern Art Week), an event that officially marks the beginning of the Modernist movement in Brazil. The event took place in São Paulo and included visual arts exhibitions, lectures, concerts, and poetry readings. The Week was controversial and incited a great deal of debate over the nature of art and its manifold manifestations in Brazil at the time.

Tales of Belazarte (*Contos de Belazarte*) was published in 1934, though the stories were written between 1923 and 1926. In tune with one of the main discussions taking place within the Modernist Brazilian movement, Andrade defended the use of Brazilian elements as a factor that could differentiate national art from that produced in other countries. He truly believed in incorporating Brazilian culture and language in all possible artistic manifestations - whether literature, music, visual arts. Those who participated in the Week attempted to draw a “Brazilian essence” into art, recognizing the multivariate forms of the different Brazilian regions and bringing them together. As Andrade wrote the stories, he was imbued with this spirit, actively experimenting with the possibilities of expressing this so-called Brazilianess.

The stories Belazarte tells (to an external narrator or a narrate) are not marked by any stereotyped exoticism, perhaps something to be expected in literature coming from what, in comparison to the center of the literary system, i.e., Europe and the United States, is deemed quaint, foreign or unfamiliar. These stories take place in the industrial neighborhoods of the Lapa and Brás in São Paulo, both originally made up of working class residents at the beginning of the 20th century, both known for their initial Italian immigration (as well as other European ethnicities) and gradual addition of migrants coming from the Northeast of Brazil, all in search of a better life in a new land. The industrialization of Sao Paulo brought with it the usual activity of businesses, streetcars,

crowds and popular entertainment in the form of movie theaters and, once in a while, circuses. This is the landscape of Andrade's *Tales of Belazarte*.

Andrade's short stories present Belazarte as a sort of go-between in the telling of the small and large tragedies of these people, all characters of dramas any reader can recognize. The stories are connected, sometimes by a character that acts in the different narratives in various roles, sometimes small, sometimes more in evidence. The language is at times simple, expressing more of an oral register (especially in the speech of the characters), at times more elaborate in the descriptions of melancholic settings where factory chimneys are set against a grayish sky, or a woman's dress evokes a feeling of longing. The narrative indicates a clear interference of the external narrator, a resource Andrade used in the storytelling, to organize and give greater insight into the possible motivations of the several characters for their decisions, or, even, for actions that do not spring from clear decision, but mostly as a reaction to factors they cannot control. Thus, it is a curious narration in which Belazarte, as a storyteller, knows much more about the going-ons of the characters than any mere narrator-witness could possibly know. Another important element of the narrative is the shift in perspective, or focalization, to use the term developed by Gerard Genette and, later on, Mieke Bal, between the narrator/Belazarte, the external narrator, and the characters. This indicates a change in linguistic choices, in the register, becoming more oral and often, due to this, with the inclusion of fragmented sentences, misspellings and common expressions in the Portuguese language.

The first story, *The Beetle and the Rose*, emphasizes the naiveté of Rosa at the beginning of the story with a number of uncommon phrasings to describe her lack of knowledge of the workings of the world. As Belazarte includes in the narration some of his opinions and thoughts on human nature and life (a recurrent resource in the stories in general), the metaphors given are unusual, requiring some thought and presenting quite a challenge in the translation of this tale. Though the urge to "correct" was present, the realization that the awkwardness, so to speak, was in the source text gave the translators a guideline to follow. If one understands that Rosa is an expression of complete and utter innocence at the start, it is essential to keep not only the vocabulary that forms the comparisons used to describe her, but also the rhythm of the narrative which, at first, reveals an easy-going flow that will contrast later with the sharpness of words and sentences, to reflect the changes the girl goes through. If at first Rosa is inexperienced even regarding her emotions, for "whenever she saw others crying she supposed crying was due, and in a twinkle, there would be endless boohooing...", and her activities as a servant to two old-maids is reported as being absentminded and lacking in purpose, her radical change brings us to actions that are unexpected: "Rosa yanks off the last of [the doll's] curly hair, a cold gesture. She pierces one of her eyes, Portuguesely, *à la* Camões...".

The second story, *Cunning Jabiru*, brings back the character of João, who in the first story ends up in a blooming friendship with Carmela, a main actor in this one as well. Once again, the beginning presents us with a small description of a "tidy drawer" and "how easy it is to find underwear even in the dark, even at the very back! But then a sloppy person

comes around, turns everything upside down, where's that underwear?" to later inform the reader of the purpose of this image in the undoing of the beautiful Carmela, the beloved daughter of an Italian immigrant. Carmela, not being acquainted with disorder, grief or the ways of men (or life itself, for that matter) comes face to face with a most attractive individual in the figure of the Snake Man, a Brazilian from the Northeast, resourceful, handsome and skittish.

The third tale is *Cain, Cain and all the Rest*. One of the most intriguing stories of the collection, it tells of the falling out of two close brothers, for no apparent reason. The characterization of Aldo and Tino places them physically as two Brazilian types, the former with all the features of an Italian, "strong, more like his mother than his father... the maternal paunch [becoming] muscle in his red body", while the latter is "the darker, grumpier one. He took after his father's Brazilianess, that blistered color that never changed and those undeveloped muscles that no hard work could build". The outcome of the brothers' enmity seems to bulldoze not only the family, but others ("the rest") who are merely standing on the sidelines, initially not having anything to do with the disagreement. This involvement will lead to the sixth story.

Deep-eyed Girl takes place in the Bras, among a different class of people. These members of an emerging middle class are interested in their daughters' education, though the ultimate purpose is the rise in social class that this education can give them through marriage. Thus, Dore, the young girl at the center of the narrative, is primed for a better future, one in which her beauty and improvement will allow her to make a good marriage. Though she is portrayed as being charming and seductive towards Gomes, her music teacher, the narrative offers us much more of what he goes through in the relationship and how he manages to survive his ambiguous feelings.

One Grave, Two Graves, Three Graves, is the only story in which Belazarte is a homodiegetic narrator, being part of the drama of his servant Ellis. The descriptions of Ellis's blackness, as well as his wife's, Dora, seem strange to our ears today, though here we must remember how literature is not an expression of the culture and thoughts we express, but that of its own time. Belazarte's relationship with Ellis and his family is filled with mixed feelings on the part of the narrator, one in which the master-servant relation is questioned.

Little Boys don't Cry... do they? picks up where the events of *Cain, Cain and the Rest* ended. The main focalization is that of Paulino, the four-year-old son of Teresinha and Alfredo. The material and spiritual poverty of the family is touchingly seen through Paulino's eyes, the little "leftover" amongst adults who barely understand what moves them and why they suffer at all.

The last story, *Nizia Figueira, at your service*, takes us back to the nineteenth century when "silence would snuff out São Paulo so early, not even nine o'clock", though the town is referred to as a "city" in the story. The neighborhood of Anastácio is still filled with ranches and small-town life, the setting for Nizia's story of happiness and unhappiness, but above all, of acceptance.

The translator's job here was not an easy one, though I fail to find one translation done with care that is ever easy. To the cultural elements sorted out initially with the use of Peter Newmark's categories of ecology, material culture, social culture, customs/activities/procedures, concepts and, finally, gestures/habits, were added those strategies that any translator makes use of and which Newmark also refers to, such as naturalization, footnotes, compensation, as well as others. In the initial phase of our group's research Newmark served as a guideline for the type of decision to be made when facing major cultural items. At times, the translators decided to maintain the item as it was in Portuguese, to keep the "strangeness" of the text. After all, we did not want to naturalize a work whose particularity was to call attention to the Brazilian quality of its theme and language. However, this decision was always made when the comprehension of the term would not compromise the general understanding of the narrative, either because of the context or because of the possible familiarity of the term to an English speaker.

Another guideline used was the theory on narratology developed by Gerard Genette and Mieke Bal. The use of narratology enables the translator, as a specialized reader of the text he or she is translating, to perceive several aspects of the source text that might otherwise go unnoticed. As an example, we can refer to the narrator's desire to emphasize a specific event to the reader through the focalization of a character (the focalization will bring to the narration a particular aspect of the story whether through the perspective of a character or a narrator). This happens, for instance, when Joao sees Rosa differently from all the other times he has seen her before. Before, Joao sees her neutrally, so much so that she is not described in any particular way. At one point, things change:

However, one day, while he was wrapping the loaves in his cart he noticed Rosa who was coming back from the store [...] The sun shone directly on the body that was coming, It was then that João noticed Rosa had changed. She was another person. Entirely a woman with shapely legs and two noticeable breasts under the smoothness of her blouse, like a ruby ring inside a glove...

In narratological terms, there is a deceleration of time with Joao's focalization. Something that might take no more than a few micro seconds in "normal" time, is described in detail to highlight Joao's new view of Rosa's beauty. Right after this moment, the rhythm changes from one of mesmerization (Joao's focalization) to the narrator (Belazarte, though I suspect the external narrator has a hand in it) who has comments to make that break the spell:

That is, João didn't see any of this; I am embellishing the story. From the nineteenth century on, story tellers seem to feel the need to specify these naughty details. Neither did he see the clear amber *camoesa* apple color of her skin, ... nor the eyes of sunny radiance... João only realized he felt uncomfortable and figured that the discomfort was Rosa's doing. Curiously, though the narrator is criticizing all the frill, he still can't resist "embellishing" himself as he refers to the color of Rosa's skin and her eyes.

There are innumerable ways narratology can help in translation and the stories presented here are a testimony to many possibilities.

The final product we have here, of course, is never final, as any translator of literature knows. We hope, nevertheless, that readers can have their first contact with Mário de Andrade, if this be the case, through these stories that register a time in which Brazil was attempting to build its own cultural references. It is the result of two years (2010–2012) of research in a group made up of three students of Translation at Letras/UFRGS, namely, Aline Lampert, Cristina Bordinhão and Regina Fleck under my supervision. We all worked together on the project, translating and revising. It took a good amount of time to translate, a great deal of thought and, above all, courage to face the challenge, which these students had.

REFERENCES

BAL, Mieke. **Narratology** — Introduction to the Theory of Narrative (Second Edition), Toronto: University of Toronto, 1997.

GENETTE, Gerard. **Narrative Discourse: an Essay in method**, Ithaca: Cornell University, 1980.

NEWMARK, Peter. **A Textbook of Translation**, Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall International, 1988.

Some interesting reading material about the *Contos de Belazarte* can be found in:

1. <<http://www.seer.ufrgs.br/cadernosdoil/article/viewFile/25317/pdf>> (on the role of Belazarte as a narrator).
2. <http://www.abralic.org.br/eventos/cong2008/AnaisOnline/simposios/pdf/040/IRENIA_SIA_OLIVEIRA.pdf> (on the modernization of Sao Paulo).

