

WORDS FROM THE GUEST EDITORS. READING THE POEM IN TRANSLATION

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*One might, for example, speak of an unforgettable life or
moment even if all men had forgotten it.*
Walter Benjamin

Reading the poem in translation is the thematic axis around which the dossier we present in this edition of *Alea* is organized; but it is also the motto from which is rehearsed, here, the formulation of a problem that, although at first glance may suggest a note of obviousness, is far from being perceived as a question of major relevance – and is only rarely circumscribed and discussed as such – in a good part of the criticism that takes the poem in translation as its object. Indeed, from a more contemporary point of view on thinking about translation, we could even consider that it is already a problem when *reading the poem in translation* doesn't even minimally present itself as a *question*, when *reading the poem in translation* is nothing but a gesture taken as obvious, trivial, self-evident, not rarely as a consequence of the naturalization of a set of presuppositions equally taken as obvious: such as, for example, the *idea-desire* that a translated poem can or even should be its “own” original poem in another language; or, even, the *idea-stigma* that any translated text that falls short of or beyond realization (as perfect as possible!) of this *idea-desire* does not represent, otherwise, a confirmation of the proverbial image of translation as loss or treason, what, ultimately, does not do more than inexorably *reduce* translation to its negativity. A negativity, by the way, not always explained and problematized (sometimes even disguised... repressed) when it is about other discursive practices founded in the same conditions of language, such as those of reading, of criticism, of commentary, but systematically and incessantly remembered (along with being communicated to the four winds) whenever it

comes to translation.¹ In the configuration of a translation theory that more consequentially confronts some of the questions that regard the relationality and dimension of alterity implicated in all translation practice, *reading the poem in translation* is a problem because of how much this gesture of reading imposes itself as a *question* of epistemological, critical, aesthetic order. It is when *reading the poem in translation* represents an effort of resistance against what is more conventionally assumed to be obvious and natural in every gesture of reading that takes the translated poem as its object, to know: its *reduction* to the manifestation of life of another, to the representation of the life (and survival) of the original poem (in the Benjaminian molds), without the translated poem attracting any form of attention that opens up the non-stigmatized possibility of it being singularly read as another text, in its alterity. It is when *reading the poem in translation* presumes a gesture of reading that is not only attentive to the differences between the poem in translation and the text taken as its origin, but is also committed to thinking of the possible significations of these differences, a gesture interested in reading these differences in a key that does not reduce them to a stigmatizing calculus of losses. It is when *reading the poem in translation* presupposes an object that, along with *representing* a form of life of the original text, also imposes itself as a text in its difference, *constituting* a singular form of life — presupposing, then, that it is just when constituting itself (also itself) as a singular form of life, that the poem in translation becomes capable of fulfilling its Benjaminian purpose of representing the life (or endurance) of the original poem. Finally, it is when *reading the poem in translation* imposes itself as a gesture of resistance against a perverse scheme of reading that we can characterize as a *regime of indistinction* of translation as a form of life.

Reading the poem in translation, in this sense, also is a gesture founded in a criticism of the vital dimensions that Walter Benjamin confers to translation in *The translator's task*, reducing it to a species of vital manifestation of another form of life, of the original work. Although this is not the aspect more frequently highlighted in his preface to the translation of *Tableaux Parisiens*, by Baudelaire, it is worth remembering that, in the famous essay, Benjamin also outlines a reflection on the notion of life, in general, and the life of the work of art (the literary work), in particular (Benjamin, 2011). And, in this same movement, the form of life privileged by the German thinker is the human: not exactly in its biological expression, as in *Leben blouses*, but, yes, as a form of life (human) capable of inscribing itself in another plan, the

¹ Not treated, here, is a negation of the condition of negativity in which every translated text subscribes, but, yes, of an attention to the fact that there is a common condition to each and every text and that, therefore, if we should not ignore it (neither in the case of translation, nor in any of the other cases), neither can we accept the reduction of the translated text to this condition.

plan of history – hence, in the context of Benjaminian thought, the notion of *survival*, of endurance, gains more importance than the proper notion of the *life* of literary works.

In the long tradition of occidental thought, as we are well aware, the dimensions of this that we only refer to here in a quite abbreviated fashion in terms of a “human form of life” were constructed decisively and significantly through difference and similarities to other forms of life, with special emphasis on animal life. We assume, in the manner of Benjamin, that the original works constitute a form of life in the molds of human life and if we accept, beyond Benjamin, that the translated text also constitutes a singular form of life, it is worth asking what form of life we may associate with translation. Would the translated text be a form of life shaped in the same molds as human life, but with *blosses Leben*, without the privilege of inscription in the plan of history, as in the case of the “proper” literary work? Or is it, for this or another reason, that the translated text will not surpass being the animal counterpart of the life of original works, even if due to the continued practice of *bestialization* of its singular form of life?

It is important to emphasize, here, that we are not referring to any unusual, bizarre, or weird modality of relation with the translated text: we are talking about the seemingly innocuous and widely naturalized practice of inscribing the translated poem in a bestial condition, which does not manifest itself in any mode unfamiliar or unrecognizable to the reader, be he a professional in the discipline or not: it is when *reading the poem in translation* signifies looking at the translated poem, but seeing it exclusively as the original poem, repressing or stigmatizing all forms of difference; it is when *reading the poem in translation* is reduced to a modality of reading that only seeks the original poem in the translated poem (or forms of what is conceived to be original), as if the translated poem absolutely were or could not be anything beyond or below this and as if every form of difference triggered in this relation were just the expression of a lack or excess; it is when *reading the poem in translation* translates itself, in the ultimate analysis, to seeing it without perceiving it as *another* text, in hearing it without considering that, beyond giving voice to another text, it may also have a voice to speak of itself, in reading it without accepting its alterity. In each case, finally, the gesture of reading ends up giving shape to the poem in translation as a species of a form *without life* and *without voice* or, at most, as a form of life that is inferior, low, rough, brutish, and it is exactly in this sense that we can understand this implacable practice of reducing the translated poem to the terms of *bestialization*. Therefore, the poem in translation would be for the animal (or a form of bestialized human life), just as the original poem would be for the human (or an outstanding form of human life, capable of inscribing itself

in the plan of history), which also signifies that we can use an approach to the complexity of thought about the animal-human relation to think about some aspects of the relation between translated poem and original poem.

Without losing sight of the fact that we are talking of very distinct things, this approach can prove promising if we permit ourselves to abstract, from these two very different worlds, the *relational reason* that both minimally appear to share. That is, if we return our attention to the order and relational dynamic that usually underpin the most stigmatized modes of perceiving the other, thinking about the other and acting towards the other in these two relational universes, then both are strongly marked and defined as much by reluctance to be open to the specificities that make the other in the relationship an other in fact and law, as by reduction of the other to its own values and principles. In the case of the human-animal relationship, it means a fundamental relational reason of the regime of indistinction that ends up resulting, for example, in diverse variations of what we know as speciesism, but also in the condition of instrument, guinea pig, object of consumption, or wild beast in which animals are so commonly and widely inscribed. And it is precisely from these same variations of a regime of indistinction of the other as a singular form of life that we can approach the determining relational reason of the merely instrumental condition in which the translated text is usually inscribed and which we characterize, here, as the bestial condition of translation.

In this regard, the widely disseminated stigma of translation's inferiority, as well as its proverbial infidelity or unreliability, but also the assumption of its categoric insufficiency may be understood as emblematic manifestations of this *bestialization*. However, this same regime of indistinction also produces much subtler and less evident manifestations: such as, for example, when the criticism that has a translated work as its object, despite explicating a theoretical foundation that seems to reaffirm the understanding of translation as a transformative activity and of critical order and *despite* still highlighting one or another translation gesture as deserving of praise, cannot help lamenting, in the translated text, faults and excesses. In other words: when the criticism is incapable of escaping that gesture (even if occasional, discreet) of consecrating stigma, of eulogizing negativity or of writing the obituary of the translational undertaking, in which attention incorrigibly concentrates itself on the particular mode in which the translation does not cease to not be the original work. It becomes about a gesture so much more curious for suggesting a form of systematic ritualization of loss in the critical treatment of the translation. Confronted by the poetic, a certain poetic, it is as if translation and grief turn consubstantial. However, it is as if death, instead of being considered only a constitutive element of the vital shape of translation – an

inherent element to all understanding of life crossed by transformation –, ends up becoming the main sign of prohibition to any possibility of treating translation as a form of life, reducing translation to a form (unique and exclusive) of death and criticism, to a labor (unceasing) of grief.

Another aspect that merits focus, in this approach, is the question of interdependence evidenced between the different instances implicated in these orders and relational dynamics. It is worth remembering once more that theory on the human was constructed very broadly based on presumed differences in relation to the animal, to the point that we can hardly think of these two forms of life in complete isolation, we can also remember, here, that exclusively in relation to a translated text does a literary work become a work referred to as *original*. We could take away a series of consequences from this question of interdependence, because if, in relation to themselves, from a certain point of view, literary works usually feed a certain image of unity, conclusion, stability and perennality, it is precisely in relation to the texts that translate them, and in relation to these other (bestialized) forms of life that call for a privileged occasion for the exercise of criticism on this idealized image of the original work, as well as for the perception, the experience, the test of its own condition of unending, instability and ephemerality.

Sovereignty and bestiality

If in the most stigmatizing cases, the poem in translation is usually reduced to a *bestial* or *bestialized* condition, we affirm that the original work, as a counterpart of this same relation, generally in inverse proportion, is usually raised to a noble and elevated condition, worthy of veneration and adoration, power and majesty. In this way, we may also conceive the relation between translation and original based on the relation between two other figures: the *beast* and the *sovereign*.

In his seminars titled *The beast and the sovereign*, delivered at the École des Hautes Études *en Sciences Sociales*, between 2001 and 2003 and articulating questions tied to the notion of sovereignty of the nation-state and its fundamental onto-theologico-politics, Jacques Derrida departs from his reading of literary works and philosophy to develop a theory of the diverse figures of the *beast* and the *sovereign*, along with a theory about the *beast* and the *sovereign* beneath and beyond their condition of figuration. In addition to discussing the logic that underlies the beast's condition of submission, the theorist calls attention to a perspective in which we may presume that the beast and the sovereign resemble one another, even without being similar (Derrida, 2010, p.79). This approach is based on a certain condition of *exteriority in relation to the law*, a common condition, in which, despite their

many differences, beast and sovereign both share the specific sense of being “outside the law”: the sovereign *above* and the beast *below*.²

Now, it is also said of literary texts (raised to the condition of works of art), with frequency, that they may be *above the laws* more conventional to a certain textuality, both to the extent to which the literary work defines itself as a form of rupture, a break from expectation of what is usually textually assumed as more conventional as well as to the extent to which the literary text defines itself by not being reduced to a strictly instrumental dimension of its textuality, constructing itself, in addition, as a *work*. But of the translated poem it is assumed, not rarely, that it is *at the margin of laws of textuality*, to the exact extent to which the translated text, in its most stigmatized condition, is conceded neither the right of constituting *itself* as a text, constituting its *own* textuality. Due to this bias, the translation approaches the original to the same extent to which, per the reflection proposed by Derrida, the *beast at the margin of the law* approaches the *sovereign above the law*: to meet each other, both, to some extent, *outside the law*. What consequences can we take away from this approach to a reconfiguration of the relation between translation and original work? For original works, the perception that the condition *above the law* is also a condition *outside the law*? For translated works, attention to the fact that without being confused about the condition of the original works, they share, with them, a regime of exception in relation to the laws of textuality – how much, in their own measure, do they also *make* and *make themselves* works? However, Derrida also explores the distinctions between beast and sovereign and does it from a fundamental relational and constitutive trait of their forms of life, affirming that beasts are not alone, not solitary, while the sovereign is always alone.³ For the theorist, however, the sovereign’s solitude makes him a figure apart, separated, isolated, unique, indivisible and exceptional, while the beast, for its part, inhabits a condition in which he is not given the possibility of being apart from another, being on his own.

Just like the lonely sovereign, the literary work, the work referred to as original (in its apparently majestic, untouchable condition of stability and perennality) presumes the possibility of dispensing with any form of relation, which also involves the possibility of constituting itself as a form of life independent of any mediation – and, therefore, in the absence of any gesture of reading. Perhaps the “sovereign expenditure,” in the words of Georges Bataille, would be up to it, as developed in the article “The notion of expenditure” published in 1933. This relates to the idea that literature, play,

² “Ils se ressemblent là où ils semblent tous deux hors la loi, au-dessus ou à côté de la loi” (Derrida, *Séminaire La bête et le souverain*, volume II, 2010, p.79).

³ “[...] les bêtes ne sont pas seules, un souverain est toujours seul” (Derrida, *Séminaire La bête et le souverain*, volume II, 2010, p.29).

the erotic, the mystical are engendered by something that constitutes us in general: the periodic movement or desire for loss, for spending. Expenditure is the primary dimension of the human. Men assure their survival as they “accede to the insubordinate function of free expenditure” (Bataille, 2013, p. 33). Jean Piel affirms that at the base of this construction exists the notion of surplus and a solar key: the idea that the “sun gives without ever receiving” (Bataille, 2013, p. 12). This solar expenditure acquires a central role in Bataille’s reflection on sacrifice. This expenditure may also be symbolic, in that the proper representation of tragic loss, in literature and theatre, adds up to what the author called, in poetry, “creation through loss” (Bataille, 2013, p. 23). Faced with these forms of sacrifice and giving, inscribed in the poetic, the translation would be on the opposite axis, reduced to processes of reproduction and conservation.

How do we not confront this *sovereignty* of a much reiterated construction of originality with the fact that the literary work cannot dispense with its dimension of relationality, that it is only in the scene of a relation of reading (and translation) that makes a work a work? But the translated text (in its stigmatized, bestial condition), not capable of being and existing on its own, would end up condemned not only to the yoke of relationality, in general, but also to a relation in particular: its relation with the original work. The poem in translation, in its *bestialized condition*, is so markedly reduced to its relationship of origin, which ends up being confused with it, the form where it does not seem possible to think of it alone, as if the translated work were nothing beyond this relation presumed to be the only possibility, as if the translated work could only “be” in the original work’s shadow, as if the translated work could not constitute, itself, a singular form of life, establishing, from this, its own forms of relationality.

The dossier

The dossier we present unfolds a variety of these forms of relationality. In the article by Izabela Leal, “Writing as word drawing: translation and image in *Yānomam mytho-poems*”, we see the drawings of Koromani Waica, Mamokè Rorowè and Kreptip Wakatautheri, in addition to the edition of *Mitopoemas Yānomam* (1979), photographs by Claudia Andujar, Yanomami oral narratives, two translations into Portuguese, translations into Italian and into English. The author suggests that the drawings themselves are the “original text”, reminding us of the relation between writing and drawing in Yanomami culture, while revealing this multiple interplay of differences and connections that comes from successive translational gestures.

In the following article, by Helena Martins, titled “‘Iniji’ between Michaux, Le Clézio and Helder”, another interplay develops, this time between

these three authors, where the author explores the Jacques Derrida's notion of *counter-signature*: of writing *about, with, on behalf of, in the direction of*. The author observes how Le Clézio, in his essays, and Herberto Helder, in his translations, inscribe themselves *about* the textuality of the poem "Iniki" by Henri Michaux, in the space that is of translation, but also creation and criticism.

Patricia Peterle, in turn, in the article "Spesso il mal di vivere ho incontrato de Eugenio Montale in translation", dives into two translations of this poem by Montale, by Marcos Siscar and Renato Xavier. Attentive to the dimensions of sound, rhythm and semantics, she observes in each of their correspondences and dislocations, not without indicating the "plots of irreducibility of differences between languages" revealed by two translational gestures.

In the article "In the beginning every language is foreign: Ana Martins Marques' poetry and translation", Francine Fernandes Weiss Ricieri and Waltencir Alves de Oliveira offer us a reading of poetic moments in Marques where they find a philosophy of language in dialogue with a theory of translation. These poems frequently allow themselves to be taken over by other voices and translations brought to their bodies, and put into tension "the actions of creating, translating, transposing/transporting, dislocating and inventing".

The next article, by Livia Mendes Pereira and Brunno Vinicius Gonçalves Vieira, titled "Modes of survival for poetry in translation: how Leminski sang Ferlinghetti", deals with reading in translation the poem "The Pennycandystore beyond the El" by North American poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti as sung by Leminski, in which, as the authors signal, the incarnation of criticism and Leminskian poetic subjectivity are explored. The article also presents us with a panorama of *beat* poetry's reception in Brazil and the possible dialogues between the two authors.

In "I am one who translates: translation and address in Ana Cristina Cesar", Marcos Siscar reads the article "Sublime thoughts about the act of translating" by Ana Cristina Cesar, written in the 1980s, to think about translation as departing from forms of address. It follows a path that goes from "Elegy: To his mistress going to bed," by John Donne, translated by Augusto de Campos and recorded by Caetano Veloso on the disc *Cinema transcendental*, to observe, in Ana Cristina César, the figure of what would be defined as a translator-conjuror, with its dimensions of "seduction and charlatanism." In this way, the poem brings destination to the center of the debate about translation – translate for whom? –, which would also be "the *decision* or *desire* of the reader to insert himself as its own destination".

Continuing with Caetano's memory, the next article by Karina Vilela Vilara, titled, "Circling of Fulô: the petals of Russian avant-garde poetry in Brazil", shows the translation and reception of Russian poetry in three

moments: the modernism of Mário de Andrade, reminding us that poet from São Paulo was the translator, from French, of the “Order to the armies of the arts”, by Mayakovsky, in concretism, when the first anthologies of Russian poetry published in direct translation in Brazil appeared, in collaboration with Boris Schnaiderman, and in the tropicalismo movement of Caetano Veloso.

Larissa Drigo Agostinho, in “Destroy, destroy, destroy”, departs from the book *Hölderlin’s madness: chronicle of a dwelling life*, by Giorgio Agamben, and from Walter Benjamin and Anne Carson’s readings of the German poet, as well as the poem “Destruction” by Charles Baudelaire, to consider the role of destruction in poetic creation, attentive to the gestures that move poets and artists, and dislocating the debate from the finished work to its processes.

With Ana Maria Ferreira Torres, in “The king: the translation of the poem-thing of Rilke by Augusto de Campos”, we enter the reading in translation of the poem “Der König” by Rainer Maria Rilke, observing the modes with which the translation becomes creation and criticism. The article also seeks relations between the translated king of Rilke and the king that appears in the poems of Augusto de Campos, “The king minus the kingdom”, and of Haroldo de Campos, “Praise of the Grand King”, using a debate that involves Georges Bataille’s notions of sovereignty and excess.

Marcelo Jacques de Moraes, in the article “Between France and Brazil, relations and violence, in poetry and translation”, proposes to us the following question: “How do we constitute public places of life and thought that extrapolate the framing of territory or language as enclosed spaces, as spaces of closure, places of life and thought that serve, thus, as thresholds of passage, or sharing, more or less precarious, at times violent?” The author searches for responses to this in a trajectory that progresses from the poet Christian Prigent to the theoretical reflections of Édouard Glissant, with his notions of “relational identity” and “poetics of diversity”, Jean-Christophe Bailly and his debate about notions of community and “nostration”, and Marielle Macé and her perspective of address as “*nouage*”.

In “Through the doors that cats see, the poem arrives: Cixous and Lispector in translation”, Flávia Trocoli creates a path that moves from the text *La venue à l’écriture*, by Hélène Cixous, to *Água viva*, by Clarice Lispector, and from this, returning to Cixous’ book, showing us how the project of translating *The arrival of writing* was taken over by the forms and rhythms of Lispector’s book.

Guilherme Cunha Ribeiro, in “Faking archaisms in the country of memories: translating a sonnet of Jacques Roubaud”, explores the French poet’s dialogue with French devotional poetry, centering the anthology *Le Soleil du soleil: Anthologie du sonnet français de Marot à Malherbe*, which Roubaud organized in the 1990s, to consider what the poet would call a

“memory of language”. The author presents, beyond this, a translation of the poem “The Entrance”, which seeks equilibrium, as he shows us, between the present and the past.

In “Poetic translation and productive ambiguity”, Carolina Paganine, in a trail that goes from Haroldo de Campos to the study *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, by William Empson, the “Poetry” entry in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, by Jean Boase-Bier, and the book *Eloge de la traduction*, by Barbara Cassin, concentrates on the notion of ambiguity in response to which she unveils the most frequent translation strategies. With two of these, she offers us a translation of the poem “Foreign body” by Kimiko Hahn.

Finally, the article that closes this dossier, titled, “Ancient poetry in translation: women making a difference”, Renata Cazarini de Freitas, in dialogue with translations of Homer’s *Odyssey* and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, by Emily Wilson and Stephanie McCarter respectively, presents to us a translation of an excerpt from Ovid’s myth of Daphne. With this, the author seeks to unmask the woman’s objectifying gaze, simultaneously explicating the forms of violence and oppression the source text suggests.

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And happy reading of the readings of the poem in translation!

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