

Of Power and Race and Sex — With Due Respect: On some Portuguese Translations of *Othello*

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More than a quarter of a century ago, Leslie Fiedler published a book called *The Stranger in Shakespeare*, whose aim, declared in the opening pages, was to study Shakespearian drama from the perspective of 'the relations between America and Europe, white men and blacks, Gentiles and Jews, masters of arts and savages, males and females'. Fiedler proposed to do this by focusing on 'that borderline figure, who defines the limits of the human (...) [and] has been named variously the "shadow", the "other", the "alien", the "outsider", the "stranger"' (Fiedler 1972: 11, 15).

Though from a different theoretical standpoint, Fiedler thus privileged that emphasis on representations of 'otherness' which would from the late seventies, and all through the eighties and nineties, gain increasing currency, and ultimately become a dominant mode in poststructuralist critical discourse. What Fiedler was proposing to deal with when he considered 'the stranger as woman (...), the stranger as Jew (...), the stranger as Moor (...), the stranger as New World savage' (Fiedler 1972: 15) reminds us that the contributions which in recent years were increasingly brought to bear on Shakespearian studies by multiculturalism, gender studies and postcolonial studies have tended to cluster precisely around an attention to the discourses that constitute that otherness - discourses whose evolving constructions a study like John Gillies's 1994 *Shakespeare and the Geography of Difference* has made particularly evident (Gillies 1994: *passim*).

It is therefore, in the late 1990s, virtually inescapable to take issues of difference into account when dealing with a play like *Othello* - and not just, as I hope to be able to show, from the viewpoint of *racial* difference. This sense of inevitability increases when it is *translations* of *Othello* that one means to deal with. In fact, a leitmotiv of translation studies as a growing area of research and critical attention since the late eighties is the claim that, in itself, an interest in translation supposes a sensitivity to difference, not just linguistic but cultural - in short, an attention to the voice of the other. Such assumptions explicitly underlie Wolfgang Iser's advocacy of 'translatability' as that which 'makes us focus on the space between cultures (...) [that] space between [which] opens up the experience of otherness' (Iser 1995: 32). This ultimately allows translation to be proposed as the prime model for the manifestation and acknowledgement of otherness: 'the various modes in which otherness manifests itself are already modes of translation' (Iser 1995: 32).

My reading of several Portuguese translations of *Othello* will then be informed (explicitly or not) by such assumptions. It will also rest on a consciousness that the relationship to the Shakespearian text experienced both by translators and their critics is heavily conditioned by the hypercanonical status (and the appertaining expectations) of that text. Likewise, it will try not to lose sight of what George Steiner called 'the dynamic reciprocities between successive translations' (Steiner 1993: 13), and of the way they may highlight the development of Portuguese as a language, in its

social and literary uses - even though the chronological range of the translations in question is of less than a century.

In fact, the oldest translation I will be considering was published by José António de Freitas in 1882, and the most recent by R. Correia (identified as responsible for revising the version in question, whose author is not indicated) in 1976. The others will be those by King Luiz I (1885), Domingos Ramos (1911), Frederico Montenegro (1966), and an undated translation by António Leitão de Figueiredo (probably published, from some indications to be found in its critical apparatus, between 1964 and 1966). These are the published translations which so far I could trace. In his introduction to the 1956 edition of King Luiz's translation, Jorge Faria indicates that the oldest full translation into Portuguese of a Shakespearean text was Simão de Melo Brandão's version of *Othello*, probably written in the final years of the eighteenth century - a text which, however, was left in manuscript. Faria (who indicates he had it in his private collection) endorses Brandão's claim to have translated the play directly from English, and not, as often would happen, from a French version (a claim recently disproved by Maria João da Rocha Afonso (Afonso 1993: passim); but he describes it as a rather free as well as 'colourless' version. Still according to Faria, between that date and the latter nineteenth century, some imitations and adaptations were published - usually, from French versions. However, and even while I believe that a distinction between translations 'proper' and (e.g.) 'adaptations' cannot be simplistically endorsed, in this paper I will restrict myself, for practical reasons, to texts which present themselves as translations and unquestionably fall within a conventional understanding of a translation. As to twentieth-century translations other than those already mentioned, I surmise there will have been some other versions written for specific productions of the play - but they will not have been published.

As a final remark within these preliminary considerations, it should also be said that the absence, in most of these translations, of a clear indication of the edition(s) used as sources at times complicates an understanding of the translator's options - in passages in which, say, the 1622 Quarto and the 1623 Folio read differently (this being particularly relevant in a play for which most modern editors rely at different points on one or the other of those two source texts). The exception is Figueiredo, responsible for the only Portuguese edition we would today acknowledge as 'scholarly' - with a careful critical apparatus, unquestionable evidence of familiarity with the seventeenth-century sources, and a clear indication of the edition (Dover Wilson's) on which it is based. Chronologically, the first which seemed to come closer to this was Ramos's: but, although its title page informs the reader that *Othello* was 'printed for the first time in 1622', and a careful reading both of the text and the notes shows that Ramos opts for the Quarto and the Folio at different times, the criteria for that are never explained. The critical apparatus (introduction and notes) of his translation can, however, be baffling - since a show of English scholarship coexists with (for example) giving the name James I in its French version ('Jacques I') (Ramos 1911: 231, n17). Such a detail seems to suggest that some of that scholarship will come to the translator second hand: after all, he calls his notes 'Commentarios do traductor colligidos de notaveis commentadores' ('The translator's commentary compiled from notable commentators') (Ramos 1911: 225).

Let me, however, return to my initial acknowledgement of reading assumptions largely defined by otherness, in order to take on its most obvious dimension: that of *Othello*'s blackness. The ethics (in which I share) which would more usually

determine a consideration of race in the humanities today would probably prepare the late twentieth-century academic reader to discover in these texts the signs of anguished translators' decisions when dealing with racially charged language. That expectation, however, is largely frustrated by the translations in question. One could hypothesise that what seems to be a general softening of the play's verbal violence in Correia's 1976 translation might grow out of that unease - but it is, in fact, more noticeable in areas of discourse other than that of racial abuse, and the text often provides (rather unexpectedly) instances of the opposite. Likewise, the violence of the slurs on Othello as rendered in some passages of Montenegro's 1966 translation might be understood, by its sheer excess, to serve at times a purpose of self-denunciation (i.e., racist language working against itself) - but it hardly exhibits a coherence of purpose and attitude that would allow this hypothesis to be made into a more confident judgement. As for Figueiredo's, its predominantly learned and at times rather ponderous tone can have an archaising effect which somehow makes it more difficult for the reader to bear in mind that it is a late twentieth-century text, with all the implications of that.

All in all, even in translations which are otherwise (as I will show) rather obviously bowdlerised, there are no evident signs that the translators will have experienced serious qualms when dealing with, in particular, Iago's, Brabantio's and Roderigo's racial insults. Somewhat disturbingly, there seems at times to be, on the contrary, a certain amount of overtranslation of such slurs - in particular by interpretative paraphrases. In Correia, for instance, Brabantio's words in I.2:70-1, 'the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou', is rendered as 'um repugnante monstro como tu' ('a repugnant monster like you' - Correia 1976: 88): the reference to skin colour as a specific source for Desdemona's imagined recoiling from the African is omitted, but Correia's version, in its choice of adjective and noun, actually verbalises racial hatred in a much more explicit (though rhetorically less effective) way. Almost a century earlier, Freitas had translated the same passage as 'o seio tizado e asqueroso de um ente como tu' ('the tanned and repellent bosom of a being like you') (Freitas 1882: 18). The translator apparently felt that the negative connotation of 'sooty' required additional qualification, the consequence being a more vehement manifestation of racial disgust - even though the substitution of 'ente' ('being') for 'thing' (which all the other translators also performed) might be construed as an unintentional compensation. An instance of the translator being carried away by the rhetoric of racial derision is, on the other hand, provided by Ramos, when he renders the passage in which Iago foresees that Othello will 'tenderly be led by th'nose' (I.3:395) as 'deixar-se levar pela beíça' (Ramos 1911: 13). 'Beíça' is a mildly derogatory Portuguese term for 'lip', whose use means that Ramos had in mind Othello's African features, previously mentioned in the play when Roderigo refers to 'the thick-lips' (I.1:67), duly rendered by Ramos as 'esse beíçudo' (Ramos 1911: 4) - a slur he decides to add, with undisguised gusto, to Iago's closing soliloquy in Act I.

By doing this, Ramos only confirms those racial stereotypes which his *Introduction* postulates and expands on as fully justifying Othello's characterisation, as well vindicating the 'truth to life' of the behaviour Shakespeare created for his character:

Quaes as raças mais aptas para cederem ao ciúme e resentirem-se de todos os seus soffrimentos? A experiencia historica ensina-nos que são todas as raças africanas, porque, educadas na liberdade absoluta do deserto e da tenda, são incapazes de comprehender estas incessantes transacções, estas prudentes

considerações e esta discreta tolerância que o manejo infinito das paixões recíprocas e incessantemente renascentes ensina aos homens das nossas sociedades, porque para ellas a felicidade é o orgulho da alma; o orgulho não tem pleno desenvolvimento, senão pela segurança e confiança e o amor trahido, destruindo a segurança, arruina ao mesmo tempo toda a possibilidade da vida feliz. (Ramos 1911: XIV-XV)

(Which are the races more apt to yield to jealousy and resent all their sufferings? Historical experience tells us that it is all the African races, because, raised in the absolute freedom of the desert and the tent, they are incapable of understanding those incessant transactions, those prudent considerations and that discreet tolerance which the infinite handling of reciprocal and incessantly reborn passions teaches the men of our societies; because for them happiness lies in the pride of their soul; pride cannot fully develop, but through security and trust; and betrayed love, by destroying security, at the same time ruins all possibility of a happy life)

Further down, Ramos will add a reference to '[o] quente entusiasmo da sua raça' ('the hot enthusiasm of their race').

This tendency to believe that the 'truth' of Shakespeare's dramatic character lay a lot in its 'typical' portrayal of an ethnic or racial type, and not 'simply' in the convincing representation of an individuality, was also to be found in Freitas's Introduction, three decades earlier. But in this case the translator/commentator refuses to accept Othello's blackness; following such an authority as Coleridge, Freitas endorses the view that, rather than being a black man, Othello (largely discussed as a historical character) would have had the complexion of an Arab. Therefore, while rooting (as Ramos would do) the character's susceptibility to Iago's plot in the supposed mindscape of his race, Freitas construes that frame of mind as dreamily and superstitiously 'oriental', rather than passionately and hotbloodedly 'Negro' - and he thus expands repeatedly on the 'oriental's tendency to credit dreams, and on the 'impressionable nature of his race' (Freitas 1882: XXXVII-VIII, XLVIII, LXX). Freitas's remarks are, in fact, signal instances of that mental construction of the Orient which Edward Said has identified as 'one of its [Europe's] deepest and most recurring images of the Other', a construction which 'has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience' (Said 1978: 1) - the other as 'oriental' defining himself, as Said also demonstrates, by irrationality, imprecision, lust, and an intense concern with (dis-)honour and revenge (Said 1978: *passim*). It should, however, be pointed out that Freitas's choices as a translator do not significantly further the view of Othello argued in his Introduction - to the extent that his translation, which in other respects tries to circumvent aspects of Shakespeare's text felt to be at odds with the translator's mores, does not in fact evade the explicit allusions to Othello's negritude, of which Roderigo's already quoted execration of 'the thick-lips' ('aquelle beiçudo' - Freitas 1882: 6) is maybe the most signal instance.

Another aspect of Freitas's remarks on Othello as 'oriental' will, however, have clearer implications for the connection between the Introduction and the translated text, as well as for the way the latter relates to the source text - and those are the remarks which fuse race, sex and gender. Freitas comments on the way in which understanding Othello as an Arab rather than a black man makes his marriage to Desdemona, rather than an unequal union, 'a sympathica fusão dos dois typos primordiaes da belleza humana - o typo semitico e o typo caucastico' (Freitas 1882:

XXXVIII) ('the sympathetic fusion of the two primordial types of human beauty - the Semitic and the Caucasian'). And he adds:

Se Othello fosse effectivamente um negro, e, como pretendem alguns criticos, um barbaro, um selvagem, uma natureza domesticada só na apparencia, por certo não inspiraria á patricia veneziana outro sentimento alem da admiração pela sua historia. O contrario revelaria um gosto depravado, que o poeta por nenhuma fórma lhe quiz attribuir. (Freitas 1882: XXXVIII-IX).

(Were Othello really a Negro, and, some critics defend, a barbarian, a savage, a nature tamed only in appearance, he surely would not inspire the Venetian aristocrat any sentiment other than admiration for his life story. Otherwise, it would reveal a depraved taste, which the poet in no way wished to ascribe to her.)

This passage in fact signals the translator's racially tainted defence of the protagonist's conditions to be admired and loved, from which issues an equivocal defence of Desdemona: by stating that, were Desdemona to have fallen in love with an African, she would be depraved, Freitas is authorising the point of view of Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio - the characters who voice that notion in the play, but are in fact deprived by the dramatist (through characterisation) of the moral and dramatic authority to make their views acceptable to the audience. The full extent of Freitas's positions on race and gender is in fact to be found in the today ethically most appalling passage of his Introduction - his defence of any husband's right to murder an adulterous wife, and, concomitantly, of Othello's 'justness':

o adulterio é um crime, que contém em si todos os crimes, diz Proudhon. E sabemos que todos os codigos, em todos os paizes, castigam com penas suaves e até absolvem o marido, que matar a esposa adúltera, quando o adulterio for uma evidencia.

Que é isto senão o reconhecimento de um direito que tem o marido ultrajado de fazer justiça por suas mãos? Foi isso, e nada mais, o que praticou o Mouro de Veneza.

O modo, como assassina a mulher, prova que Othello não é um faccinora, um malvado que se delicia com o soffrimento da victima. (...)

Matou-a porque julgou que era justo. (Freitas 1882: LXXII-III)

(adultery is a crime which contains in itself all crimes, says Proudhon. And we know that all legal codes, in all countries, punish lightly or even absolve the husband who kills an adulterous wife, when adultery is evident.

What is this but the acknowledgment of a right the outraged husband has to take justice in his own hands? It was that, and no more, that the Moor of Venice effected.

The way in which he murders his wife proves that Othello is not a butcher, a scoundrel who takes delight in the suffering of his victim. (...)

He killed her because he thought it was just;)

It is a passage made despicable by its ethics, even when taken in its 19th-century context (a context which does not make it 'normal' - we should remember how A.W.Schlegel had decried, precisely in a passage on *Othello*, 'the disgraceful confinement of women and many other unnatural usages'; whilst Coleridge had pointed out that 'surely it ought to be considered a very exalted compliment to women, that all the sarcasms on them in Shakspeare are put in the mouths of villains' - Bate 1992: 479-85). But the passage is also degraded by its lack of critical sense, which in fact spoils the moral and emotional complexity of the tragic design by demoting a 'larger-than-life' tragic protagonist to the status of an outraged bourgeois husband. With Freitas, it is as if the translator's imagined male bonding with the romanticised 'oriental' overcame the latter's otherness - a quality reserved, implicitly, for the woman, with whom no such solidarity is experienced.

The construction of woman as stranger (to retrieve Leslie Fiedler's formulation) can also be seen in Ramos's *Introduction* - which goes one step further than Freitas by partly inculpating Desdemona for her lot, while only being able to understand her love for the African as a self-punishing whim:

O valor, a virtude, os longos soffrimentos d'Othello cegaram-na; não viu as diferenças desagradáveis que o separavam d'ella, offereceu-se amorosamente ao velho soldado como vitima expiatoria da sua laboriosa vida, como holocausto encarregado de resgatar as suas duras fadigas. Offereceu-se como holocausto! Não haverá n'isto um vislumbre de perversidade? Os anjos também pôdem ter a sua maldadesinha; é um excesso de zelo seraphico, um exaggero vivissimo d'humildade, uma expansão de caridade ardentissima. (Ramos 1911: XVI-XVII)

(Valour, virtue, Othello's long sufferings blinded her; she did not see the unpleasant differences which separated him from her, and she offered herself amorously to the old soldier as a scapegoat for his arduous life, as a holocaust that would redress his severe hardships. She offered herself as a holocaust! Is there not in this a glimpse of perversity? Angels can also have their little evil; it is an excess of seraphic zeal, a vivid exaggeration of humility, an expanse of the most ardent charity.)

But if this passage might suggest an individual bent, the exceptional and the unique, Ramos will promptly turn it into a generic judgement - a gender-determined judgement, which is half condescension and half indictment:

Mas esta angelica malvadez, que é a da esposa d'*Othello*, é muito feminina. Shakespeare, que comprehendeu o coração humano em toda a sua extensão, viu n'este amoroso ardor de sacrificio o elemento primario d'um dos typos mais attrahentes, patheticos e mais altivamente feminis que jámais algum poeta creou. (Ramos 1911: XVII)

(But this angelic fiendishness, which is that of Othello's wife, is very feminine. Shakespeare, who understood the human heart in its full extension, saw in this amorous ardour for sacrifice the primary element of one of the most attractive, pathetic and more proudly feminine types which any poet ever created)

Behind this understanding of the character lies an inability to accept as 'normal' a woman's passion that is as vocal and daring as Desdemona's is in Act I, in the face of an exclusively male public power: the response is to see the virtuous but assuming woman as that mixture of saint and whore which haunts Ramos's comments - and it will be my contention that the bowdlerisations patent in the translations analysed owe a lot to the perplexities and the fears which that originates. Of those fears, the one which more often recurs explicitly throughout *Othello* is that of cuckoldry - a fate which, in Portuguese as in other southern European languages and cultures, inevitably conjures that image of the cuckold's horns which is also present in the text of *Othello*. It may be revealing that none of the translations in question adopts a single or coherent option for translating the repeated occurrences of 'cuckold', and for tackling an image like 'this forkèd plague' or a dictum like 'A hornèd man's a monster and a beast' - more often than not evaded through euphemisms such as 'o homem enganado', 'o coitado' ('the deceived man', 'the poor man'), or decorous paraphrase like 'aquelle que é trahido' ('that who is betrayed'). Even Montenegro, the first who bluntly translates 'to cuckold' as 'pôr os cornos', shies off that option in later occurrences. In this respect, though, King Luiz I provides the most curious case of a rather erratic attitude in terms of verbal decorum. In his prologue, the royal translator explicitly vows to be true to the bluntness of Shakespeare's language:

entendi que seria um crime mutilar esta tragédia por mal cabido pudor, deixando de traduzir frases que, embora rudes, não me julguei autorizado a eliminar. (...) como tradutor, devo estar isento, para o público, da responsabilidade da linguagem, que ele por certo hoje não empregaria, mas que a fidelidade da tradução me obrigou a conservar (Luiz 1885: 17)

(it was my understanding that it would be a crime to mutilate this tragedy out of undue prudery, by not translating sentences which, though rude, I did not feel entitled to eliminate. (...) as a translator, I must be exempt, before the public, from any responsibility for the language which he [Shakespeare] would surely not employ today, but which I was forced to preserve in the name of a faithful translation)

When dealing with the issue of cuckoldry, these honourable intentions will be kept with passages such as 'esta córnea praga' (for 'this forkèd plague') or 'Um homem cornudo é um monstro e uma besta' (Luiz 1885: 158) - one of the more literal renderings, within the six translations considered, of the memorably concise 'A hornèd man's a monster and a beast' (IV.-1:62). But strangely baffling will be King Luiz's solution for Emilia's question, in IV.-3:74-5: 'who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch?' - rendered by this monarch as: 'quem não coroaria o seu marido para o fazer monarca?' (Luiz 1885: 198) ('who would not crown her husband to make him a monarch?'). It is true that 'coroar', in Portuguese, can be a popular euphemism for 'cuckolding', but it is most peculiar that this should have been the choice of a translator who happened to be a 'crowned head'.

Another revealing example of the translators' embarrassment with images of male sexuality under threat occurs with Iago's (apparently invented) narration, in III.3, of Cassio's supposedly 'revealing' dream: in the course of a war campaign, the two men would have shared a bed, Cassio having in his sleep taken Iago for Desdemona and made some amorous advances, vigorously hugging and kissing him - a high point of this, according to Iago, occurring when Cassio 'laid his leg / Over my thigh, and

sighed, and kissed'. The description is farcical, and may be exploited as such on stage, but the homosexual embrace (even if as an unwilling gesture) apparently touched a sensitive chord: in 1976, Correia plainly excised the 'leg over thigh' passage (Correia 1976: 132), whilst Freitas had, in 1882, given us a clear-cut example of what Bakhtine would describe as the play between 'high' and 'low' images of the body (Bakhtine 1970: *passim*) - by rendering '[he] laid his leg / Over my thigh' as 'e cingia-me o pescoço' (Freitas 1882: 116) ('and he clasped me by the neck').

If perplexities arise when one considers the translators' choices for dealing with the humiliations of sexual betrayal, or of an accidental homoerotic involvement, an embarrassed attitude will also predominate when it comes to graphically describing sexual activity - in particular when the woman seems to embody the paradigm of saint rather than that of whore. Separated by almost a century, both Freitas and Correia extensively bowdlerise Iago's obscene descriptions of Othello and Desdemona's union in Act I, Scene I, where passages like 'you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse' (111-12), or 'your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs' (116-17) are either eliminated or made vague by Correia (Correia 1976: 84ff) - and were rendered by Freitas as 'Quereis ter por genro um cavallo da Barbaria?' ('would you have a Barbary horse for a son-in-law?') and 'vossa filha está nos braços do Mouro' ('your daughter is in the arms of the Moor') (Freitas 1882: 8-10). Correia also gives us examples of a translation of precise sexual images as vague sentimental ones, in particular with two passages in Iago's soliloquies: 'I hate the Moor, / And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He's done my office' (I.3:380-2) becomes 'Mas odeio o mouro, porque se murmura que minha mulher o ama' (Correia 1976: 98) ('But I hate the Moor, because it is murmured that my wife loves him'); and 'I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat' (II.1:286-7) becomes 'suspeito de que o mouro andou em tempos pelo meu jardim' (Correia 1976: 107) ('I suspect the Moor once strolled in my garden'). Ten years earlier, however, the latter passage had been translated by Montenegro in a way which suffered from a directly opposite attitude: even if not in a constant and coherent way, Montenegro's translation is at times at pains to prove how free from squeamishness it is, the result being over-explicit and gross renderings of sexual imagery. Thus, 'I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat' (II.1:286-7) becomes 'desconfio bem que esse Mouro lascivo pulou de gozo na cama com a minha mulher' (Montenegro 1966: 63) ('I do suspect the lusty Moor has bounced with pleasure in bed with my wife') - the over-explicitness being obvious when contrasted to Figueiredo's more literal 'eu suspeito que o Mouro lascivo pinchou na minha cama' (Figueiredo n.d.: 149); and, in the same soliloquy, and even more excessively, 'I fear Cassio with my night-cap too' is rendered as 'receio que Cássio também já se me tenha montado a fêmea' (Montenegro 1966: 64) ('I fear Cassio may have mounted my female too') - as against Figueiredo's 'receio bem que Cássio também já se me tenha metido na cama' ('I do fear Cassio may also have slipped into my bed'), a version which also discards metonymy in favour of literalness, but does not so seriously overtranslate Shakespeare's passage.

Not many lines below in Act II Montenegro will adopt the same strategy for dealing with the passage in which Iago tries to tempt the courteous Cassio into an equivalent to locker-room talk about Desdemona - one of his most daring quips being: 'And, I'll warrant her, full of game' (II-3:19), which Montenegro translates as 'E aposto que se mexe bem na cama' (Montenegro 1966: 66) ('And I bet she moves well in bed'). This passage had, in fact, been rendered rather frankly (if we bear in mind that it concerns the difficult issue of women's sexual enjoyment) by both Freitas and

Ramos - respectively as ‘...doida por gosar’ (Freitas 1882: 64) and ‘E que gosta de gosar’ (Ramos 1911: 62) - as well as by Figueiredo, in terms (again) similar to but less explicit than Montenegro: ‘E aposto que há-de ser mexidinha’ (Figueiredo n.d.: 150); and it would in 1976 elicit from Correia the strangely risible: ‘E tem pinta de ser alegre e saltadora como um cabrito’ (Correia 1976: 109) (‘And she has all the signs of being merry and skippy as a little goat/ kid’). Of this group of translators, in fact, the one who finds it most difficult to translate references to Desdemona’s sexuality is King Luiz, who promptly forgets his initial vow of bluntness and renders the same words as ‘cheia de atractivos’ (Luiz 1885: 79) (‘full of attractions’) - this strategy entailing that the contrast between Iago’s insinuations and Cassio’s courteousness is lost. At times King Luiz will in fact translate sexually charged passages without technically bowdlerising them, but resorting to a vocabulary which will in practice prevent most of his readers from ever understanding him - as is the case with his version of Cassio’s wish that Othello may arrive safely in Cyprus and ‘Make love’s quick pants in Desdemona’s arms’ (II-1:80); the frankness of this passage is in fact retained by the other translators (to the exception of Figueiredo), whilst King Luiz decided to render it impenetrable: ‘faz (...) os crebros anélitos do amor nos braços de Desdémoma’ (Luiz 1885: 65).

King Luiz will not be alone, however, in not stomaching well the obscenities and insults in which the play abounds, almost all of them directed at Desdemona - both in the character’s presence and absence. The word ‘whore’ has a high number of occurrences, and in the six translations it is almost never given as its corresponding Portuguese four-letter-word - ‘replaced’ rather by the more neutrally descriptive ‘prostituta’ or ‘adúltera’, or by a range of socially more acceptable synonyms for the lost woman, such as ‘rameira’ or ‘desavergonhada’. The rhetorical, aesthetic and dramatic costs of such prudishness - as in this final stage I will try to prove - are high, in that they ultimately put at risk the tragic dimension of the play as constructed by its language and characterisation. At its most obvious, it turns the pathos of certain pronouncements into potentially risible assertions - as when Desdemona’s words, after being insulted: ‘I cannot say “whore”’ (IV.-2:160) are rendered by King Luiz as ‘Não posso pronunciar - prostituta’ (Luiz 1885: 187) (‘I cannot pronounce - prostitute’), which makes it sound as if the alliterative sequence is too hard for Desdemona to articulate... The rather systematic rendering (by all six translators on most occasions) of ‘whore’ as ‘prostituta’ also lays an emphasis on denotation which is, with most occurrences of the word, a lot less important than its sheer purpose of abuse and invective: when Iago, in the last scene, calls his wife Emilia (who is publicly denouncing him) a ‘villainous whore’, he is not accusing her of selling sexual favours (as, for instance, Figueiredo’s ‘Miserável prostituta!’ would suggest - Figueiredo n.d.: 251) - but rather means to level at her the most violent verbal attack possible, both as retaliation and as intimidation; this purpose can only be achieved in translation with equally violent and socially punitive language, which is plainly not the case with the majority of the solutions found by these six translators.

From the viewpoint of dramatic rhetoric, worse is the case, however, of those concise pronouncements which abound in the protagonist’s voice, indicting Desdemona or inveighing against Iago in a register which is characteristically that of Jacobean tragedy. One instance is Othello’s imperative: ‘Be sure thou prove I love a whore’ (III.3:356), which Correia translates as ‘Dá-me provas infalíveis de que minha esposa é adúltera’ (Correia 1976: 131) (‘Give me infallible evidence that my wife is an adulteress’) - a rendering which totally destroys the tone and the rhythm of the

original (emphasised by its iambic regularity). An even clearer instance is Othello's already posthumous judgement on Desdemona (before his anagnorisis) as the irretrievably lost woman: 'She turned to folly; and she was a whore' (V.2:133). King Luiz's is, in this case, the best of the available options, in rhythm and concision: 'Desvairou; era uma rameira!' (Luiz 1885: 224) ('She went mad; she was a strumpet'). But Shakespeare's lapidary statement is diluted, made banal, decorous and verbose in most of the other translations: 'Tinha-se entregado ao vicio; era uma prostituta' (Freitas 1882: 203) ('She had given herself up to vice; she was a prostitute'); 'Tornou-se uma maluca, uma prostituta!' (Montenegro 1966: 207) ('She became a foolish woman, a prostitute'); 'Ela fez-se uma doida; era uma meretriz' (Figueiredo n.d.: 246) ('She went mad; she was a courtesan'); 'Ella portava-se mal, era uma desavergonhada, uma devassa' (Ramos 1911: 206) ('She misbehaved, she had no shame, she was a slut').

Of these alternatives, Ramos's is, I believe, the worst, in that, by its lexical choices and its enumerative excess, it demotes the tragic protagonist's utterance to the level of vulgar name-calling - even though Ramos refrains, in this passage, from literally translating 'whore'. He is, however, the only translator to actually employ the Portuguese word 'puta' - equivalent to 'whore', but avoided in all the other translations - but he employs it only twice, in passages he will have judged more poignant. The daring of that choice, however, is only apparent, and does not mean that Ramos deals more honestly than other translators with the discourse on women in *Othello*. On the contrary, Ramos's perspective on women and sexuality (already hinted at when he suggests, in his Introduction, that women are at bottom a mixture of angels and devils, ultimately responsible for what befalls them) is best revealed in the gusto and zest with which he resorts to a long list of terms of abuse for lost women. To Shakespeare's 'whore' and 'strumpet', Ramos answers with (besides the sparingly used 'puta') 'marafona', 'debochada', 'perdida', 'pécora', 'porca', 'desavergonhada' and 'devassa' - all the verbal wealth the woman on the street corner might hear from pimp and bourgeois customer alike, the language of bourgeois stigmatisation, distinct from (but ultimately more prejudiced than) obscenities in their vernacular nakedness. And misogyny is what Ramos also reveals when describing the only actual prostitute in *Othello*, Bianca; Shakespeare's text reads: 'It is a creature / That dotes on Cassio' - but Ramos translates it as: 'Esta creatura faz andar a cabeça de Cassio á roda' (Ramos 1911: 142) ('This creature has turned Cassio's head'). In short, whereas Shakespeare's Bianca suffers from an infatuation with Cassio (from whom she will get no respect and little affection), Ramos's Bianca is charged with causing Cassio an infatuation - the lost woman ultimately responsible for almost ruining a good man. But Ramos (later followed by Figueiredo) at least translates 'whoring' (the male activity of seeking that ruin, as referred to in Iago's phrase 'This is the fruit of whoring'-V.1:116) as 'libertinagem', which carries a negative connotation - whereas for both Freitas and King Luiz 'whoring' was no more than a benevolently and humorously phrased 'vida airada'.

Ramos's options when characterising women, from his Introduction to his translation, is only the most extreme example of a practice, also exhibited by the other translators, which helps vindicate Iago's view of women - that they are all whores. That this implication is always lurking close is made apparent by the translations of Othello's soliloquised pronouncement on Emilia: 'This is a subtle whore' (IV.2:20) - rendered by Freitas, Figueiredo and Correia as 'É uma espertalhona' ('she's a clever one'), 'é uma devassa espertalhona' ('she's a clever slut'), and (worst of all) 'É

mulher astuta' ('she's a crafty woman'). As vindicated by the final roles of the women in *Othello*, this is a view which Shakespeare's tragedy ultimately defeats - whilst some of the options made by his Portuguese translators would seem to risk reinstating it.

That can be the cost of a predominant attitude behind the translations considered which King Luiz's prologue had made explicit - an attitude governed by the belief that, had Shakespeare written for a later, supposedly more refined age, he would have shunned those 'improprieties' most of these translators seem to believe it is their duty to rid him of. Their understanding of the means to achieve their purpose will entail that a strategy of 'naturalisation' or (as Lawrence Venuti would call it) 'domestication' (Venuti 1995: *passim*) is largely employed - translating Shakespeare predominantly into the accepted language of a late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century bourgeoisie, with its narrowly defined decorum. This (as I hope the examples given will have shown) ultimately dates the translations all the more - whilst losing tragedy the dimension of strangeness proper to its conventionally high ground, and favouring instead the sameness proper to a discourse of prejudice and small decencies.

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