

RIGOUR AND POETIC LICENCE IN TRANSLATING SHAKESPEARE'S *RICHARD II**

Like any other literary translation, the task of translating Shakespeare's *Richard II* raises important linguistic and rhetoric issues, as far as historical and cultural contexts are concerned, both in departure and arrival languages. Two distinct conceptions of language (taken both synchronically and diachronically) have to be considered, as well as accurate observation of the different poetics involved, according to specific literary moments in each language. In general linguistic terms, between Shakespeare's English and contemporary Portuguese there are actually significant differences to take into account. Differences that are both structural and grammatical, dealing with the fact that English is a germanic whereas Portuguese is a romance language, and each of them has its own way of realising the usual subject/ language/ world relationships. In fact, in twentieth century philosophy of language these relationships can no longer be questioned in terms of a logic-mathematical unity, because of the pervading sense of relativism that produces not one but various and different logical systems. The importance given to the use of language in situation as well as to the reception context where translation occurs enhances the multiform relationship of language and speech, as a kind of bridge between the original intentions and functions of the shakespearean play and their interpretative possibilities in the arrival language.

Focussing now on a possible conception of language in the Elizabethan era, as a kind of starting procedure accompanying the whole translation process of *Richard II*, one must be well aware that it is still in some aspects related to a kind of late medieval structure of the world which was firmly rooted on a highly logical order. Together with the famous treatises of *grammatica speculativa*, there were thorough linguistic and semantic analyses of the so called *medi significandi*. A brief

* This text was adapted and somehow enlarged from my presentation – under the same title as above – at the *Symposium: Shakespeare for the 21st Century*, held at the Faculty of Letters U. Porto (14-16 Dec. 2000).

account of the latter should be illuminating in this sense¹. As a theory of language it postulates the existence of the thing in itself with all its properties (*modi essendi*), which, together with its effect, produces its own understanding or intellection (*modi intelligendi*). This sort of ideal wrapping up of the understanding is followed by a rational wrapping, the sign, composed by sound (material, sensorial) and idea (rational, intellectual), thus originating the *modi significandi*, both active and passive.² It is intelligence that gives the word its function of designating what it formally intends. The word (*dictio*) expressed by means of speech (*vox*) only reveals the point of view of the subject that designs it: therefore, speech/voice is inevitably connected to meaning because intelligence gives meaning to the verbal sign that expresses a part of the being.

In this sense, a language structure articulated by speech (a sequence of signs in chain, i.e. a discourse) is itself based on the logic common ground of epistemology, the sign (logical, mathematical and verbal) functioning as the "pivot" that establishes the main relationships of subject and object, subject and world, language and world. Therefore, grammar is inscribed in logic, being itself a logical system, a conception that will prevail throughout 16th, 17th and 18th centuries with Descartes and Locke, Newton and Leibniz. Renaissance grammar, with all its indebtedness to medieval grammar, is also speculative (lat.: *speculum* - mirror), considering language as a mirror that reflects the truth of the world directly inaccessible, that is to say, its hidden meanings, for which signs are the keys.

Furthermore, in Elizabethan Renaissance, the growing influence of Humanism stresses the central position of man in the universe, the subject capable of reading it, interpreting and expressing it fully. Besides the steady evolution of vulgar tongues (*vs latin*), as collective subjective creations of man, increasing importance was being assumed by rhetoric associated with the practice of any kind of originality and disobedience of strict grammar and poetical conventions in the use of language. This originality, included in the so called poetics of ornament, accounts for the exquisite formal arrangements and the intensely lyrical quality of Shakespeare's play, most exuberant in Richard's long soliloquies. These poetics of ornament, typical of this period, aimed at achieving the formal splendour of the classics and even to surpass it, while language was seen not only as an object of study but as something that had a life of its own and could become the real flesh

¹ Further reading: KRISTEVA, Julia — *Le Langage, cet inconnu*, Paris: SGPP, 1969, cap. XI.

² By "active" *modi significandi* is understood the *ratio* given to the material form by the intellect: a certain material form means a certain mode of being; a "passive" *modus significandi* is the actual mode of being meant by the material form when the "active" *modus significandi* acts on it. (Siger Courtrai, *Summa modorum significandi*, 1300).

and blood where the actual body and intellectual freedom of the Renaissance man came to expression.

To translate Shakespeare's *Richard II* also meant to confront various critical lessons in a number of critical editions, as a means to solve specific problems raised, mainly connected with interpretation, punctuation and even spelling, which has been mostly modernised. As far as proper names of characters and places were concerned, *Richard II* being a historical play, these were for the most part kept in their original English form. There were however some inevitable translations of some of these nouns according to their familiarity or general use in Portuguese, as is the case, amongst others, of the monarch's name Richard (as "Ricardo"), the family name Lancaster (which was presented as "Lencastre", by direct reference to D. Filipa de Lencastre, Queen of Portugal, married to D. João I de Avis) and Gaunt (Gande, as it is traditionally known in Portuguese historical reports). Also well known places like London, Ireland or France have already been long submitted to translation in the various languages, so that it offered no difficulty at all: London is "Londres", Ireland is "Irlanda" and obviously France is "França". However, English titles like "Sir" and "Lord" were kept unaltered, except for the Portuguese spelling of "Lorde", whereas the spelling of "York" as a family name did not change into the Portuguese "Iorque" – like it happens with New York, translated as "Nova Iorque". Following the general procedure of adopting modernised words and spellings, the modernised spelling of "Bolingbroke", as used in the Arden and the Penguin editions, was preferred to the archaic "Bullingbrooke" of the Cambridge edition, although it seems that the actual noun is still pronounced according to the archaic phonetics. As a rule, however, even when editions chose to retain some archaic forms, following Q1 more closely, this was not consistently translated into my Portuguese version, in which a modernised Portuguese diction was preferred. That is to say, the words expressions and speech sequences, the harmony of rhythms and cadences in the flow the entire verse composition of the play were chosen to adjust more closely to a modern poetic sensibility in Portuguese and, therefore, make it more appealing to a contemporary Portuguese reader, not only a scholar or a student of Shakespeare, but someone from a wider and more general audience. In this respect, my ultimate purpose was to produce a literary translation in Portuguese of the Shakespearean text that, being as literal and close as possible to it, could stand on its own and be read and enjoyed as such, somehow in a detached, autonomous, way towards the original text.

This also meant to preserve as much as possible Shakespeare's lyricism throughout the play, which I believe is its main distinctive feature, lending a general elegiac tone to Richard's tragic character and allowing it to spread over all surrounding characters. I must admit that prior to the actual translation of the Shake-

sperean text I recalled and tried to keep in mind Camoens' lyrical poetry – namely his *Sonnets* – and in some extent his play, *El-Rei Seleuco* (*King Seleucus*), as a periodiological reference in Portuguese Renaissance literature I could use as a possible link to the Elizabethan literary text.

As is also the case of *Richard III*, in *Richard II* Shakespeare was using a fairly regular pattern of verse – usually unrhymed – in iambic pentameters with anapaestic variations and on certain occasions new speech rhythms were created with dactylic sequences. The translation of these English prosodic patterns into a romance language like Portuguese, with a different grammatical structure as well a different prosody, implies a thorough observance of the linguistic and poetic devices of the departure text that, however, must be in a way transformed and readjusted to fit the linguistic and poetic context of the arrival language. The lyrical pentameter sequences of Shakespeare's play had to go through a metrical rearrangement and submit to the syllabic system of Portuguese prosody, each line made to range from 10 or 12 syllables to a maximum of 14.³ In Portuguese poetry, this length in verse is more frequently used in epic compositions, based upon a regular length of 10 or 12 syllables, in the so called "Heroic" and "Alexandrine" lines respectively. But, a 10-syllable line can be a lyrical measure as well. As I mentioned above, I used Camoens' lyrical 10-syllable line in the *Sonnets* (which had been largely influenced by the Petrarchian sonnet) as my reference to translate Shakespeare's dramatic lyricism in the iambic pentameter, allowing though for a compromise again between rigour and license, this time choosing not to follow an impossible regular 10-syllable line structure, but adopting the pattern of free verse with a quasi-regular structure of 10 to 14-syllable lines, unrhymed, in order to preserve the lyrical effect of most speech sequences. In fact – and contextual constraints within the play apart – the longer tirades of characters like King Richard and his wife Queen Isabel, Bolingbroke, John of Gaunt, the Duchess of York, could perfectly be read alone and thought of in terms of single lyrical poems.

Considering its historical context and poetics, *Richard II* was taken mainly as a literary dramatic form whose theatrical purpose was never ignored. Besides, according to Pollard, Q1 is the basis from which all other Quartos set up and is likely to be reasonably close to Shakespeare's autograph, preserving what appears to be the author's dramatic pointing in his foul papers.⁴ Pollard also argues that the copy used for the Folio text was a printed Quarto that had been carelessly collated

³ There are a number of lines that could not be limited to this so called maximum of 14 syllables, lest the whole meaning of the sequence should be lost.

⁴ A.W. Pollard, *King Richard II. A New Quarto*. London, 1916.

with a copy of Q1 in use as a prompt-book at the theatre: «a playhouse copy which the prompter had kept up to date in accordance with the changing needs of the theatre» (Pollard, 88-89). Curiously enough, Q1, as well as Q2 and Q3, omits the deposition scene (IV, i, 154-318), which was likely to have been performed on stage - integrating Shakespeare's foul papers and the prompt-book - but was strategically cut out of the manuscript as sent to the printer, most certainly for political reasons by the end of the 16th century, when dethronement of a monarch became a dangerous political subject.

The Tragedy of King Richard the Second is, in fact, a "tragedy" in as far as its genre affiliations bring along its purpose as a dramatic form made for performance, meaning of course a social and political as well as a moral function of the play within and without the theatre. In other words, the tragic contents of King Richard II's life, more than a historical appraisal of facts, is a biographical insight into Richard's character, both the real man and the Shakespearean fiction, his acts and feelings, his power and his decline, his pride and shame, his friends, his enemies and traitors, the ones that loved him and would die for him, the way he died and was mourned over. Apparently, the play was intended as a kind of warning to Queen Elisabeth I, so that she would not submit to flatterers in her affections, loyalties and main decisions.⁵ Through the creation of *pathos*, allowing for mixed feelings of pity, anger and horror, poetic language in dramatic form and structure is still, *par excellence*, the traditional means to attain political and social sympathy and compromise from the audience.

There is an additional linguistic and poetic question also at issue: an interval of two centuries stands between the historical events taking place in the play and its actual writing and publication. According to Holinshed's account, the action of the play occurs in the two final years of Richard II's reign, opening on April, 29th 1398, when the King arrives at Windsor and assigns to Mowbray and Bolingbroke

⁵ See Stanley Wells (ed.), *King Richard II*. The New Penguin Shakespeare: «Elizabeth, for all her popularity, was not exempt from criticism, and a charge often brought against her was that she was excessively influenced by favourites. This was one of the reasons why she was liable to be compared to Richard II. And there is good reason to believe that Shakespeare's play had special significance for his politically minded contemporaries. (...) If Elizabeth was often compared to Richard, the most obvious candidate for identification with Bolingbroke was the Earl of Essex, a favourite of the Queen who was himself ambitious for power (...) When in 1600 Essex was on trial for having returned from Ireland the previous year against the Queen's orders (...). In the following year a play about Richard II, almost certainly Shakespeare's, was used as an instrument in the political struggle.» (pp.12-13); apparently, the performance at the Globe Theatre was by the Company of players to which Shakespeare also belonged and was paid for by Essex supporters, an a political defying gesture against the Queen.

a day for their trial by combat, and closing in March 1400, with the exhibition of Richard's corpse by Bolingbroke, now King Henry IV.⁶ Shakespeare wrote *Richard II* in the last years of the sixteenth century and the earliest definite date of publication of the first Quarto is 1597. There is however Sir Edward Hoby's letter to Sir Robert Cecil referring possibly to a private performance of the play two years before, on December 7th, 1595, but it could as well have been *Richard III*.⁷

There is no point in trying to find a possible adjustment of diction and style in the play to its medieval setting, because no such historical sense, as it was to be fully developed only in the nineteenth century with the Romantic idealism, could be found in Elizabethan or Renaissance poetics.⁸ The prevailing role of content, idea or thought over form, which dominates the classical context of western thought and aesthetics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is well defined in the various poetics of the time, by the close association of mimesis and pragmatism. Moreover, this is particularly true in the conception of drama, not only as genre, but specially in its immediate connection with theatre. Recurring images of mirrors – either the actual objects or their multiple correlatives, like water or other reflecting surfaces – can be referred as clear examples of the intended aesthetic and moral effect of the play, as they provide very successful scenes for long dramatic soliloquies.

On stage, the mirror-image is not only verbal, as spoken by the character, but also visual, the actual reflection being part of the scene. *Richard II* has one of these intensely dramatic moments, when King Richard is on trial before Bolingbroke, Aumerle, Northumberland and other nobles, in Westminster Palace, and agreed to resign the throne to Bolingbroke. Nevertheless, as a last request he asks for a mirror so as to see on it the reflection of his face as the image of his own ruin (IV. i. 265-291):

Richard: (...)

Enter one with a glass

Give me that glass, and therein will I read.

⁶ Raphael Holinshed, *The Historie of England*, London, 1586-87.

⁷ See Peter Ure (ed.), *King Richard II*, The Arden Shakespeare, Walton-on-Thames, Methuen, 1956, p. xxx: «If a play is meant, it might as easily have been *Richard III*, *Woodstock*, *Jack Straw*, or some other ply in which a King Richard appeared».

⁸ We can refer to a historical conception of language dating from the end of the Middle Ages, if we take a philological point of view, by which a comparative grammatical study of several languages was made in order to find out their common origin, mostly the hebrew. Examples of this kind of study are the works of G. Postel, *De Originibus seu de Hibræicæ linguae et gentis antiquitate, atque variarum linguarum affinitate* (Paris, 1538) and G.-B. Baliander, *De ratione communi omnium linguarum et litterarum commentarius* (Zurich, 1548).

*No deeper wrinkles yet? hath sorrow struck
So many blows upon this face of mine*

And made no deeper wound? O flatt'ring glass,
Like to my followers in prosperity,
Thou dost beguile me. Was this face the face
That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face
That like the sun did make beholders wink?
Is this the face which fac'd so many follies,
That was at last out-fac'd by Bolingbroke?
A brittle glory shineth in this face;
As brittle as the glory is the face,

[*Dashes the glass against the
ground.*]

For there it is, crack'd in an hundred shivers.
Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport -
How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face. (276-291)

Here follows my translation of the passage just quoted. The play being all written in verse, the exact number of lines has been strictly kept throughout, even though some (very seldom) changes as to Shakespeare's order of contents in several lines had occasionally to be made:

Ricardo: (...)

Entra alguém com um espelho

Dai-me o espelho, pois nele vou ler.
Ainda sem rugas mais fundas? Já a tristeza
Descerrou tantos golpes neste meu rosto
E não fez inda feridas profundas? Enganas-me,
Lisonjeiro espelho, como esses adutores
Em tempos de prosperidade. Era este o rosto
Que todos os dias debaixo deste tecto
Albergava dez mil homens? Era este o rosto
Que, como o sol, cegava os olhos que o viam?
É esta a cara que encarou tantas loucuras,
Que por fim se viu desencarada por Bolingbroke?
Uma glória precária luz ainda nesta face;
Precária como a glória é a face;

[*Atira com o espelho ao chão.*]

Ei-la estilhaçada em mil pedaços.
 Atenta, rei silencioso, à moral desta história:
 Quão depressa esta dor me destruiu a face. (276-291)

The translation kept the anaphoric structure of Richard's rhetoric questions as he confronts the mirror in his hand and finally throws it on the floor, in a symbolic gesture anticipating his tragic fate. Three synonyms in Portuguese were used to translate the English word "face": "rosto", "cara" and the English homonymous "face". The translation of the Shakespearean pentameter into its possible syllabic meter in Portuguese prosody led to a systematic contention in line structuring and arrangement which favoured the choice of shorter words, so that a sum of 10 up to 14 syllables was kept throughout the whole play. For this reason, "rosto", although with the same two syllables as "cara" and "face", is a masculine noun and therefore demands a monosyllabic possessive pronoun ("meu"), instead of the disyllabic feminine pronoun ("minha") used for the other two feminine alternative nouns. Also, in poetical conventions, "rosto" stands best for a higher poetical style, more suited for the lyrical context of King Richard's soliloquy. The use of the more colloquial "cara" (l. 285) has to do with its direct translation of the English "face", both noun and verb (Port.: "encarar" - l. 285). The use of "desencarada", another word stemming from "cara", was also taken into account for the translation of "out-fac'd" as meaning "stared down". In the last lines quoted, the homonymous "face" was used in the Portuguese translation to convey its double meaning of "face" and "surface", precisely when Richard's face is but an image - a surface - on a glass that is about to be thrown down and broken into a thousand pieces: «... /As brittle as the glory is the face /... » (ll.286-288; 291).

Above all a man of theatre, Shakespeare sensed dramatic form as a play-text to be represented before a real audience, both entertaining and persuasive of its own message. A scene, an event, a whole plot from the earlier history of the kingdom could be recovered and performed on the Elizabethan stage and be fully identified and enjoyed by the audience, but the language used could by no means be remote from its actual use in contemporary society. This accounts for some anachronisms that were perfectly admitted by an Elizabethan audience and about which, moreover, no one cared to be rigorous. Once again in Act IV,i, at Westminster Palace, Fitzwater throws his gage in contempt against Aumerle who denies being responsible for Gloucester's death: «... with my rapier's point» (39) – «Com a ponta do meu espadim vou voltar/ Essa traição contra o teu coração/ ...». It is actually in the 18th century, with the Augustans and their strict sense of poetical rigour – according to traditional latin prescriptions – that the anachronic use of the word «rapier» is brought to discussion, namely by Samuel Johnson, who argues that this

kind of slim sword was not to be used until the Elizabethan age, i.e., much later than the historical medieval setting of the play. In the Portuguese translation this kind of anachronism was not meant to be felt, as the word chosen for “rapier” – “espadim” – relates to the Shakespearean use rather than to any other possible medieval sword used in Portugal.

Another instance can be found in Act V. i. 54, suggesting Isabel’s immediate departure to France, just after the King’s deposition. Quite on the opposite, as far as historical facts are concerned, Isabel was kept in England as long as possible because the English wanted to avoid the agreed refund of her dowry. However, one of the first measures Bolingbroke took was to send back home Isabel’s French attendants. But Shakespeare was well aware – and in this regard his sense of drama and tragedy was one with Aristotle’s – that history and poetry could not coincide, should the actual cohesion and necessity of the play be weakened. A pitch of tension is reached just before Richard’s tragic death occurs, when the couple is forever set apart, obeying to Bolingbroke’s irrevocable orders:

Richard: (...)

Part us, Northumberland: I towards the north,
Where shivering cold and sickness pines the clime;
My wife to France, from whence set forth in pomp,
She came adorned hither like sweet May,
Sent back like Hollowmas or short’st of day. (76-80)
The same speech is translated as follows:

Ricardo: (...)

Separa-nos, Northumberland: eu para norte,
Fustigado p’lo frio que arrepia e p’la doença;
A minha mulher p’ra França, donde saiu com pompa,
Aqui chegando adornada com a candura de Maio:
Parte, qual dia de Fiéis ou dia ainda mais curto. (76-80)

Most obviously, it is not the translator’s task to decide upon plot matters like these that have to do above all with the general arrangement and effect of the work itself. But matters related with the symbolic charges of certain days and dates can be object of discussion and submit to contextual changes within the translation frame of references without any damage to the original sense of the text. «Like Hollowmas ...»: the expression refers literally to All-Saints-Day, which in Elizabethan time was celebrated on November 12th, very close to the shortest day of the year, December 21th, as the text suggests. Nowadays, however, All-Saints-Day is

celebrated on November 1st, a day just before All-Souls-Day – “Dia de Fiéis” – and that is why, together with syllabic contention, I found the non-literal expression more suitable to translate “Hollowmas” than the literal and longer “Dia de Todos os Santos”. Besides, the symbolic association of the Queen’s departure, adorned with sombre November, with All-Souls-Day did not seem out of context at all.

This brief account of a long and tough process of translating Shakespeare’s *Richard II* into Portuguese only aimed at pointing out some of its most relevant steps, though all of them were made of painful choices between what I call a genuine scientific scruple for what has been throughout the centuries been (so precariously) established as the “Shakespearean text” and what can actually be translated into another language, into another moment in history, where people, their habits and tastes, have in the meantime changed. But Shakespeare has this immense quality only possible in men of great genius – his universality that speaks throughout any time and place. In the very peculiar way of poets, he makes history flow and keep pace with his own pen, his eyes and his ears, with the characters he creates or recreates, and with the scenes and stories that he knows will become legends.

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