

ON AFFECTIVELY TRANSLATING VIRGINIA WOOLF'S DIARY

SOBRE TRADUZIR AFETIVAMENTE O DIÁRIO DE VIRGINIA WOOLF

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ABSTRACT

Although 20th-century scientific discourse disregarded affect as unscientific, and despite this being contested by thinkers such as Nietzsche and Spinoza, only recently could we scientifically argue that affect is inseparable from cognition and building knowledge. This article aims at analyzing how my own practices were embodied and mediated by affect when translating into Brazilian Portuguese the diary of Virginia Woolf. I embarked on it as part of my doctoral research with a concept of “impartiality” in translation that was undermined when I was faced with the diary’s manuscripts. Positioning myself was inescapable after encountering a text I had only known in print and in an impersonal form; a *body* of work theoretically of private nature, written along 44 years, with its gaps, blots, and oscillating handwriting. This article has the double aim of contributing to studies on translation and affect reflecting on possible ways of using Derrida’s undecidability as a translational strategy, using as an illustration my own process of translating Woolf’s diary, while also helping to reflect on how the affect theory may expand previous considerations made by Woolf herself and other thinkers such as L. Zimmermann, G. Spivak, and H. de Campos.

Keywords: affect; translation practices; Virginia Woolf; life writing.

RESUMO

Embora o discurso científico do século XX tenha descartado o afeto por considerá-lo não científico, e apesar de tal posição haver sido contestada por pensadores como Nietzsche e Spinoza, apenas recentemente pôde-se argumentar cientificamente que o afeto é inseparável tanto da cognição quanto da própria construção do conhecimento. Este artigo objetiva analisar como minhas próprias práticas tradutórias foram mediadas pelo afeto ao traduzir para o português brasileiro o diário de Virginia Woolf. O projeto foi conduzido como parte de minha pesquisa de doutorado, durante a qual minha ideia inicial de “imparcialidade” na tradução caiu por terra perante os manuscritos do diário woolfiano. Diante de um texto que até então eu só conhecia impresso e de forma impessoal, de uma obra teoricamente de natureza privada, escrita ao longo de 44 anos, com suas lacunas, borrões e caligrafia oscilante, não me foi mais possível não tomar posição. Este artigo pretende contribuir para os estudos sobre tradução e afeto pensando possibilidades de utilizar a indecidibilidade de Derrida como estratégia tradutória, valendo-se de meu processo de tradução dos diários de Woolf como ilustração, ao mesmo tempo em que busca refletir como a teoria do afeto pode expandir considerações anteriores feitas pela própria Woolf e por pensadores como L. Zimmermann, G. Spivak e H. de Campos.

Palavras-chave: afetos; práticas tradutórias; Virginia Woolf; escritas de si.

ON AFFECT AND TRANSLATION

Translating has always involved processes of displacement and difference, regardless of the biases it has assumed throughout its history – from debates on equivalence to binary oppositions, such as resistance versus fluency, or domestication versus foreignization (Nida, Schleiermacher, Venuti). However, it also involves *hospitality* towards the different, even if it resists translation. It is noteworthy that hospitality and difference occur not only in the circulation of the final translated product but in the very process of translating.¹ No translator is immune to the works they translate: they are always also *affected* by them, both along the paths they themselves take in their works, in terms of the decisions they must make at every turn of the process of translating, and in those they propose to the *other/reader* who, in reading their translations, also becomes affected.²

Nonetheless, the field of TS (Translation Studies) has been brought into being by the “norm-focused paradigm of descriptive translation studies (DTS)”³ which, despite being of utmost importance to provide its

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1 The notion of hospitality is addressed in more than one of Derrida’s works, and notably in *On Hospitality* (2000).

2 I speak here of affect in light of what Clare Gorman (2015, p. 4) comments about Derrida’s thought in *The Undecidable*: “as Derrida’s most famous statement in *Of Grammatology* (1976), ‘il n’y a pas de hors contexte’ (there is nothing outside of context) (Derrida 1976, 136), claims, meaning is never simple and pure and is always troubled by the interaction between text and its context”. What Gorman calls “interaction”, I name “to affect” – as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (“to have an influence on someone or something, or to cause a change in someone or something”).

3 Koskinen (2020, p. 14) explains: “Although the rise of the discipline in the 1990s coincided with a postmodernist, poststructuralist and postcolonial phase that eschewed technocratic approaches and favoured emancipatory stances and politically and ethically attuned researcher-positions, the descriptive approach, with its systems-theoretical basis and a tendency to seek generalizations and provable propositions, proved more influential and has had a more sustained effect on the field.”

scholarly basis, also overshadowed our need to “live with” translation. Contemporary turns in the field point out that, in addition to seeking translation structures and laws, “to fully understand translation one also needs to understand its *affective* side, the ways in which it forms a part of the lives of those involved with it” (KOSKINEN, 2020, p. 15).

Affect is an opaque concept that is subject to controversy. While the term is regularly used by translation scholars concerning the so-called “affect turn” in cultural and social studies (CLOUGH, 2007), other terms such as *emotion*, *feelings*, and *sentiment* are also employed. *Affect* is the term adopted here, in the sense not only of emotions, but mainly of the ability to affect and be affected by the self and others (be it texts, cultural/social/political practices, or other beings). It would be that “before-sensation” which precedes its conceptualization or rendering in words, or, according to Gregg and Seigworth (2010), “the name we give to the (...) visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, (...) insisting beyond emotion”.⁴ Thus, it is seen here chiefly as the ability to devise a new concept of rationality which may also sustain that which is involuntary and mediated by emotion (SAFATLE, 2016). It is noteworthy that only recently could we scientifically argue that affect is inseparable from cognition and knowledge building, that there is no emotion without cognition and vice-versa (LANE et al., 2000).

Deemed as too irrational, unscientific, subjective, and vague when it comes to building kinds of knowledge which are to be trusted, or deemed “correct”, “worthy”, and “objective”, affects have traditionally been banned from intellectual activity which is in consonance with logocentrism. One of the great influences on this theoretical position was Arthur Schopenhauer with the notion of a “purely knowing subject” – a subject who is “will-less, painless, and timeless” (SCHOPENHAUER, p. 179), as well as devoid of specific feelings, interests, affects, and passions. Friedrich Nietzsche, however, creates in *On the Genealogy of Morals* a countermodel to that objective knowledge exemplarily modeled by Schopenhauer – and he does so by valuing affection. Objectivity, as he states,

is not contemplation without interest (...) There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective knowing; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our ‘concept’ of this thing, our ‘objectivity’ be. But to eliminate the will altogether, to suspend each and every affect, supposing we were capable of this – what would that mean but to castrate the intellect? (NIETZSCHE, 1989, sIII.12).

Furthermore, Nietzsche considers as a “castration of the intellect” the willed suspension of affects done in the name of rationality. This, which may at first seem an apparent paradox, ceases to be so when we consider that for Nietzsche all knowledge is an expression of a certain perspective, a certain point of view, a certain angle, constituted by a specific *constellation of affects*. Knowledge, then, is *not contrary* to passions; instead, it represents the very result of a compromise between different affects and passions, grounded in the idea of *also*.

Before Nietzsche, however, Baruch Spinoza had already brought affect to the forefront of knowledge construction, and his work is often cited in affect studies. In an explicit challenge to mind-body dualism, a Cartesian dualism, Spinoza thought that rather than being two different substances, body and mind/soul were two attributes of the same substance, integrated in a unity. In the *Ethics*, he disputed with the Cartesian primacy of the mind over the body. For him, the object of the human soul is none other than the body: “the Mind and Body are one and the same thing, which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension” (E. III. prop. 2). Later, Spinoza affirms that the “object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, and furthermore the actually existing body” (E. II. prop. XIII).

Such embodied knowledge construction, coupled with Nietzsche’s perspectivism of affects, is what I consider to be at the core of this relatively new concept of rationality previously exposed – that is, one that *also includes* affection. Embracing non-dualism, shunning away from binarism, it comes close to the Derridian notion of “undecidability”, the process of uncovering the ambiguity attached to signifiers that are founded on oppositions, by disclosing that each half of the opposition does not constitute a separate idea, but is rather a necessary part of the whole. In other words, each signifier brings its silenced oppositions within it. It is by choosing to look at the elements of a given text from a different perspective that the rise of meanings that differ from the main accepted one – the most accepted one – may occur (DERRIDA-ROUDINESCO, 2004 [2003], p. 24). Jacques Derrida has devised terms, the undecidables, to enable him to “signify (...) his double gesture and double reading of texts in

4 For a thorough discussion on the different terminologies across affect theories, see Koskinen, 2020, especially Chapter 1, section 1.3.

order to uncover how undecidability dwells within the heart of meaning and interpretation” (GORMAN, 2015, p. 4).⁵ He understands them as

unities of simulacrum, “false” verbal properties (nominal or semantic) that can no longer be included within philosophical (binary) opposition, resisting and disorganizing it, without ever constituting a third term, without ever leaving room for a solution in the form of speculative dialectics. (DERRIDA 1981, p. 43)

The notions of *différance* and supplement demonstrate the workings of those undecidables, and it is the previous one which interests me the most for the purposes of this article. Derrida comes to the idea of *différance* by dialoguing with Saussure. In trying to explain *différance* (“neither a word, nor a concept”), he says that in it

the signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. (...) It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. (DERRIDA, 1982, p. 22)

In *différance*,⁶ therefore, we have at play *multiple* (or, if we will, *different*) *perspectives* of denotation, making an element irreducible to a single definition – and therefore, at least in terms of possibilities, making it also irreducible to a single translation. It is at that hinge, I argue, that a translator’s agency operates. If we dislocate the idea of translating from an activity defined by the much-disseminated aim of the “best translational choice” (the Cartesian paradigm that, when a translator is faced with a deadlock, there will be *only one* “ideal” choice or resolution) to one traversed by undecidability, we change the logics of its reading. To understand translation as such is to be aware that whenever a translator faces a deadlock there is not *one* solution alone that can solve it, for the number of possibilities that each decision presents *bleed into one another, contaminate each other*. That is not to say that in such cases the translator will not make a choice (they will have to, in order to proceed with their work); instead, it means that their decision will not erase all the other possible decisions within the universe of options built by their every translatorial move throughout the text. In other words, it acknowledges that all the untaken decisions *are also* acting in a productive way within the interpretation of the (translated) text. Every translatorial decision, whether considered to be the “best one” or an inadequate choice, opens a *new locus* of enunciation in the target language: it displaces previous interpretations and forges new meanings for a given translated text.⁷

EXPLICITLY SPEAKING OF AFFECT: A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Affect has more often been present implicitly than explicitly in translation studies, and research in the field has traditionally shown an inclination toward the natural sciences or psychology, more focused on the mind than on the body or on sociocultural contexts, as pointed out by Kaisa Koskinen (2020, p. 29). I intend to discuss in the present article how translators’ agency (in terms of their translatorial choices) may escape this binarism, while at the same time, it can shun some of the consolidated dichotomies of translation studies (such as the aforementioned domestication/foreignization, or resistance/fluency).

Affect is seen here as a crucial transversal concept (or bridge concept), allowing to involve body and mind simultaneously when translating, in a process that Brian Massumi (2015) names “thinking-feeling”. This notion invokes some of the ideas previously discussed, such as Spinoza’s indissociation between body and mind. Moreover, it transcends subject-object dichotomy, for it is *relational* by nature, affecting *while* being affected. In order to advance that discussion, as an illustration, I will consider the process of my own translation of Virginia Woolf’s diary into Brazilian Portuguese. Rather than trying to define a “single” or “ideal” way in which affect can affect translation practices, I limit myself to show some of the ways in which my own thinking when translating has

5 The three main undecidables are the *phármakon*, the *khōra*, and the *hymen*.

6 *Différance* simultaneously is and is not a difference (*difference*), for it carries in itself a graphic sign (the “a” in place of the “e”) which is inapprehensible by speech, a sign that is sonorously hidden, and that at the same time constitutes an *also*.

7 As put forth so beautifully by Iamne Reche-Bezerra (2017) in her dissertation, *Um pensamento sobre a tradução: O caso da indecidibilidade*.

been informed by my affects. For, as Koskinen (2020) puts it, affects affect translating in multiple ways: they are “a process rather than a fixed position, bearing witness to the notion of translating and interpreting as affective labor”.

I embarked on the translation of Virginia Woolf’s diary in 2013, as part of my doctoral research. My original intention had not been to translate it, but to study the diary and to show the similarities between its composing strategies and the ones that Woolf employed when writing her other literary works (novels, short stories, essays, plays). That is, I wanted to identify in her texts: (a) marks that could hint at the fact that she made no previous distinctions between genres when she sat down to write; (b) that these distinctions often came (when they did) after the process of writing was concluded;⁸ and (c) the many ways in which it shaped her modernist views.

Nevertheless, I was faced with an initial problem, namely, the fact that at that time her diary had not been translated into Brazilian Portuguese in its integrality. Even the publication of the unabridged version of Woolf’s diary in English was recent. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeille had concluded its edition in 1984, mere thirty years before. In Portuguese, only fragments and excerpts were available when I began to work, most of them in Portuguese from Portugal. I decided to translate the diary into Brazilian Portuguese because, while Woolf was a well-known writer in Brazil, and as such a fair amount of her works had been translated in the country, the majority were novels or short stories.⁹ Furthermore, even when it came to Woolf studies abroad, her diary had mostly been analyzed as a text which was useful to illuminate her “real literature” (novels and short stories, her “fiction”), but not as a literary text on its own. Comparatively little attention had been given, until then, to her so-called non-fiction (diaries, letters, memoirs, essays).

The term “so-called non-fiction” was not used unintentionally. Distinguished for her transversality, for the “passing in-between” in her writing, as Deleuze and Guattari have put it, Virginia Woolf often challenged the very boundaries between literary genres. She famously refused to abide by strict categorizations and definitions, preferring to happily¹⁰ wander in the gaps between them. And this was undoubtedly one of the first translatorial problems I encountered. I had no map to navigate these specific uncertainties and hybridism – for, even though Woolf’s strategies of blurring life and fiction had been largely studied in her fictional work, especially her novels, the extent of the fictionalization practices in her non-fiction had not been thoroughly investigated until that moment. Thus, from the beginning, it was clear that it would not be possible to proceed with the translation without an exhaustive exploration of Woolf’s concepts of artistic representation, writing, and translating.

Another challenge was the fact that, as a genre, life writing (diaries, journals, letters, memoirs, autobiographies) poses its own analytical issues. By nature, it mingles the private and the public, life and fiction, the real and the imagined.¹¹ Due to their hybrid and liminal character, then, diaries do not easily bend to definitions: should they be read as literary works, as documents, or as both? And, when we *do* read them as literature, where can they be placed in the spectrum – are they fiction or non-fiction? These were fundamental questions I had to address in my analysis of Woolf’s diary. However, when it came to translation, the most important ones did not have to do with theoretical challenges but dealt instead with translating praxis. In other words, I had to decide what *to do* with these questionings. How could I devise ways of interpreting the diary, and consequently of translating it, that did justice to its hybrid nature while at once making it possible to abstain from binary categorizations – namely, fiction or non-fiction, life or literature?

Despite not knowing it at that time, I initially approached my translator’s task with a concept of “impartiality” in translation. In retrospect, I see that I was influenced surreptitiously by Schopenhauer’s ideal of “purely knowing subject”, previously exposed. At the same time, however, while I pored over the diary, I found it strange that the edition I had in hand, the one headlined by Anne Olivier Bell, looked so tamed – in stark contrast to all other Woolf’s texts I had read so far. That is, the logical paragraphs and organized structure and punctuation seemed to be in contradiction with a writer whose texts were distinguished for their syntax experimentation and their

8 As I will discuss later, Virginia Woolf was noted for her crossing-over literary strategies between genres. She frequently refused to define her works (“A new ____ (what? novel?) by Virginia Woolf”, she would say in her diary, with variations). One of the most famous occasions in which it sometimes hindered the circulation of her books was when she chose to name her novel *Orlando* as *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), and the book ended up being placed in the Biographies section in many bookstores at the time of its launching.

9 Virginia Woolf had been largely translated in Brazil since the 1940s by writers and translators such as Mario Quintana, Cecilia Meireles, Leonardo Fróes, Lya Luft, Denise Bottman, Claudio Marcondes, and Tomaz Thadeu.

10 I use *happily* in a reference to Sara Ahmed’s (2010) reconstitution of the etymology of the word “happiness” from the Middle English “hap”, which means “chance”. This has given rise to the word “happen”, for example. Ahmed rejects the notion of happiness as your attitude towards what happens to you, rather than the contingency of what happens to you.

11 For a detailed discussion, see Schmidt, 1990; Pauls, 1996; Lejeune, 2008; Giordano, 2011; Figueiredo, 2022.

singular use of free indirect discourse. Suspecting that something may have happened during the editing process of the diary, I determined myself to have access to the manuscripts.

The opportunity was presented in 2017, when I was granted a CAPES scholarship and went to New York for four months to study and research at Columbia University. I got permission to work with Woolf's manuscripts at the Berg Collection, in the New York Public Library, and once I arrived there, I realized that my assumptions had been correct: the diary had indeed been submitted to an editing process that stripped it of several characteristics that made it similar, literarily speaking, to other Woolf's works. For the sake of legibility, it had been almost deprived, for example, of its convolutional characteristic, with the addition of organized paragraphs.

For many years – from 1918 on, to be exact – Virginia Woolf frequently wrote her diary as a somewhat continuous text, at times joining entries with no date references, and leaning on the resource of adding margins on the pages, where she would not only write the dates but also posterior comments or observations. Such a striking continuity amidst the typical fragmentation of the diary form (let us not forget that a diary is a text penned in installments for usually a long period of time) suggests that it was a work very much in alignment with her modernist literary views, and for a variety of reasons. It allowed Woolf to interpolate in a same page different moments in time, for she would often go back to an entry that had been written days, months, and even years before, and alter it by adding comments at the margins. Moreover, the habit of re-reading her own diary also affected how she wrote its future entries. Furthermore, in April 20th, 1919 she even set for herself a literary project for her diary, which resembles what she would later declare she wanted to do as a writer – as it can be seen in some of her diary entries and in a few of her essays (for instance, *Modern Fiction*):

What sort of diary should I like mine to be? Something (...) so elastic that it will embrace any thing, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds & ends without looking them through. I should like to come back, after a year or two, & find that the collection had sorted itself & refined itself & coalesced, as such deposits so mysteriously do, into a mould, transparent enough to reflect the light of our life, & yet steady, tranquil composed with the aloofness of a work of art. The main requisite, I think on re-reading my old volumes, is not to play the part of censor, but to write as the mood comes or of anything whatever; since I was curious to find how I went for things put in haphazard, & found the significance to lie where I never saw it at the time. But looseness quickly becomes slovenly. A little effort is needed to face a character or an incident which needs to be recorded. Nor can one let the pen write without guidance [...] (WOOLF, [1919]: 2016.)

In this 1919 entry, she states she sought a form which was “transparent enough to reflect the light of our life & yet steady, tranquil composed with the aloofness of a work of art”, and able to “embrace any thing, solemn, slight or beautiful”. Although she declares her unwillingness to “play the part of a censor”, she admits that “a little effort is needed to face a character or an incident which needs to be recorded” – that is to say, her diary writing cannot be “too loose” or careless; it should not be simply a jotting down of words. It had to retain the intensity of life, while preserving the detachment of a work of art. In embracing anything, it would enable her to mingle both sublime and petty everyday reflections with no clear separations between them, thus making the text hybrid and opaque due to its multilayers. In my view, such an aim is in harmony with the notions of undecidability and *différance*, as well as with what Evando Nascimento calls the “question of literature” in Derrida:

If undecidability may help to explore the “question of literature” in Derrida, it does so precisely because of his refusal to opt between true and false, appearance and essence, interior and exterior, in the series of Platonic options that are also endless, and instead lets himself fixate on the value of truth as similarity and unveiling of a full presence (NASCIMENTO, 2015, p. 106, my translation).¹²

However, the different kinds of reflections that Woolf brings undissociated on the page are often presented in separate paragraphs in Olivier Bell's edition. Also, although many of the entries were not dated by Woolf, dates were added or corrected in the body of the edited text. And while these are all welcome and commonly used editorial strategies when working with non-fiction works, in which legibility, clarity, and unambiguity are the focus, the same strategies obliterate undecidability, ambivalence, and openness, which are central in literary works. This means that, to put forward the notion that Woolf's diary should be analyzed as literature, it was necessary to return it to its manuscript *format*, which would highlight the characteristics it shares with other Woolf

12 “Se o trabalho dos indecíveis pode ajudar a explorar a “questão da literatura” em Derrida, é justamente porque ele se subtrai à opção entre falso e verdadeiro, aparente e essencial, interior e exterior na série de opções platônicas que também não tem fim, mas se deixa fixar pelo valor de verdade como semelhança ou adequação e como desvelamento de uma presença plena.”

works, especially her fiction. This is what I aimed to do with my translation, basing its *form* (not necessarily its content) more on the manuscripts than on the commercial edition.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to emphasize that I did rely on a large part of Olivier Bell's brilliant work, especially when it came to the notes, which help to clarify and contextualize events and to decipher Woolf's handwriting. To not recognize the monumentality of Bell's work would be unjust to say the least, and this was never the intention: I wanted to contribute to the ongoing research on Woolf's life writing and non-fiction, which remains, as stated before, fairly recent in comparison with her fiction, helping to establish new links between her works and to examine her writing strategies and her thoughts on art and literature by bringing to the forefront the fact that, as a modernist, textual form was indeed one of her preoccupations as a writer, and that this has its own political implications.¹³

Moreover, this decision illustrates that I did not want to stick neither to a foreignization strategy, nor to a domesticating one. I was aware that returning the diary to its original form would cause an estrangement in readers, who tend to be used to a certain consolidated diary format. Much in that line, however, neither did I want to dissimulate that it was not a diary (and one with its own singularities), that it had not been edited before, and that it was not a translation. I wanted readers to have the closest possible experience of reading the diary in its manuscript form (preserving its continuous format amidst its fragments, eliminating the headers on the top of the pages that indicate years and months, and transforming the original footnotes in endnotes, in order to prevent them from interfering in the continuity of reading), *while at the same time* highlighting that it was not a manuscript and that it relied on external information added posthumously (e.g., explanatory notes). This escaping of binary editorial decisions, that is, the intertwining of fictional and non-fictional textual strategies, allowed me to adopt a different logic in my translation process, one more in line with the movement of *différance* – or, in Woolf's terms, to the idea of a “system that does not exclude”. A system that puts into motion different entangled signifiers (some of them postponed, for not being visible at the same time) with no predefined hierarchy.

It is noteworthy that by the time I went to New York City, I had already translated a large part of the diary using Olivier Bell's edition as my single source text. When I shifted to working with the manuscripts as a second source, I thought that it would just require a simple modification of the target text formatting. What actually happened, however, was something else, unexpected. The theoretical questions I had posed before became embodied and took a concrete shape after I encountered a text I had only known in print and in an impersonal form. Having the opportunity of being face to face with Virginia Woolf's writing in a body of work that was theoretically of private nature, that had been written along 44 years – almost her entire life, considering she died at 59 –, radically transformed the translation I had been doing up to that moment because of how it altered the way I now saw Virginia Woolf. Distancing myself was no longer a possibility when I faced the pauses, gaps, blots (were they tears? blotches?), the physicality of the hand-bound notebooks, the oscillating handwriting that hesitated, only to run wildly a moment later, full of confidence and care.

This experience also placed me in the clear position of an interpreter, removing myself from the previous attitude of a bodiless, impartial, and unaffected translator. It made me understand, moreover, that such an ideal position is ultimately impossible – for “things”, or “contexts”, spill to the page, whether intended or not, altering the text. Many are the names that may be given to those “things”, indeed; but the fact remains that they are always specific to each given translator at any specific time. They can be, for instance, social and historical situations (in my case, a 21st-century woman from a peripheric country of a non-canonical language). They may be personal or global economic contexts, cultural scenarios, or ideological and political positionings, which may lead to the addition or exclusion of notes, to the hastiness or unhurriedness of a translation work, to the elimination or inclusion of elements in a text, to the imperative of embellishing it (as it was the case with the “Belles Infidèles”),¹⁴ of transforming verse in prose or prose in verse. They may likewise be named *affects*, meaning everything that surrounds us and affects us: the history imprinted in our bodies, our education or lack of it, our background, our

13 In the sense that form is one of the determinants of *how*, *where*, or *when* a work will circulate, as exposed by Foucault (1969) in his speech “What is an author?” and by Bawarshi (2000) in “The Genre Function”. This rings particularly true when it comes to diaries written by women, which were traditionally edited (and oftentimes with a heavy hand) by men – their husbands, their editors, their sons. Diaries were for a long time considered a genre of “minor importance”, especially women's diaries, associated with confessionalism and overspilling, exaggerated emotions, all of which linked to lack of literary *rigueur*.

14 See Santana-Dezmann (2016).

material conditions, but also our emotions, our preferences, our dislikes.¹⁵ All of these affects, these external and internal contexts, will, to a lesser or greater extent, guide translatorial decisions, whether consciously or not. As commented by Seigworth and Gregg:

Sigmund Freud once claimed (...) that affect does not so much reflect or think; reflect *acts* (...). However, Freud also believed that these passages of affect persist in immediate adjacency to the movements of thought: close enough that sensate tendrils constantly extend between unconscious (or, better, non-conscious) affect and conscious thought (SEIGWORTH; GREGG, 2010, p. 2).

It is also affect, ultimately, that exerts influence on the choices regarding *what* to translate (when, of course, translators are given this kind of option). Affects lean translators toward certain texts and authors. It is not a surprise, then, the fact that many begin their careers by translating informally, out of affection, moved by a desire to divulge a writer or by their own personal preferences or literary projects.¹⁶ In the lexical and syntactic levels, affects will incline a translator to opt for this instead of that specific term, to choose this and not that structure. Hence, it was no longer possible for me to interpret a handwritten sentence in Woolf's diary, with its bodily marks (of hesitation or hastiness or diligence), the same way I would when I had only known its print form. Seigworth and Gregg explain:

Cast forward by its open-ended in-between-ness, affect is integral to a body's perpetual becoming (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, *the forces of encounter*. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself—webbed in its relations—until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter.” (SEIGWORTH; GREGG, 2010, p. 3, my highlight).

My encounter with the manuscripts, moreover, clarified what has been tirelessly stressed by feminist criticism: that the personal is political, and no choice or decision can be exempt of that. Understood as those forces of encounter that happen as much outside as inside us (forces in which “subjective” and “objective” factors bleed into each other), affect is what then constitutes one of the fundamental interpretative gaps, or hinges, in any given text. And I state that it is *within* those gaps that translators' agency may move freely, whether consciously or not.

Moved by an intention to disconnect, as much as possible, from my previous decisions or my early positions, I decided to discard everything I had translated up to that moment in 2017 and start from scratch. I did not want to look back to these first drafts, which for me rang a haughty, artificial sound; and, although I knew this was virtually impossible, for the paths I had taken with the text would be somehow stamped in me, I wanted to break free from them, methodologically speaking. I was willing to take chances and be open to new encounters, and to try and listen to Woolf's fresh voice, fresh language – fresh in the sense of its newness to me. This is why, initially, I avoided analyzing other translators' decisions in other Woolf's works. It was something I did later, revising my work, by reading these translations along with the translation of her diary to Spanish by Olivia Miguel and the translation of excerpts of the diary in Portuguese from Portugal by Maria José Jorge.

To illustrate this process, I offer an excerpt of an entry from Woolf's diary (April, 20th, 1925) and my two different translations of it. One was carried out in 2016 – before contact with the manuscripts, therefore –, and the other in 2017. The formatting followed that of the source texts. I also offer a photo of a page from Woolf's diary to illustrate my considerations about her diary's form – even though it is not the one from April 20th, 1925.

15 The Brazilian poet Ana Martins Marques (2021) paints these kinds of affects in an untitled poem in which the lyrical subject muses that many of the poems she loves were in fact written by their translators – shortsighted gentlemen in makeshift studios, penniless Ph.D students, young mothers begging for silence while the washing machine clanks in the background –, and that she will never know the words that were translated. The poem is included in Marques' book *Risque esta palavra*, and it was not possible to locate an English translation. In Portuguese: “Você se dá conta/de repente/de que muitos dos poemas que ama/foram na verdade escritos/por seus tradutores:/senhores míopes/enfiados em escritórios improvisados/[...] jovens mães de família/implorando por umas horas de silêncio/traduzindo versos longos/enquanto ouvem ao fundo bater/como um mar/a máquina de lavar/[...] doutorandos mal remunerados/autores de outros poemas/que você não ama/debruçados sobre palavras/que você nunca vai ler/e lançando sobre o papel/novas palavras/que se tornarão depois/suas palavras preferidas.”

16 A beautiful example is given by Marlova Assef (2013). Although she never uses the term “affect”, it is the underlying motivation of the poets she analyzed, when making their translational choices.

First version

Source text (established by Anne Olivier-Bell, published in 1978-1983)

Monday, 20 April

Happiness is to have a little string onto which things will attach themselves. For example, going to my dressmaker in Judd Street, or rather thinking of a dress I could get her to make, & imagining it made—that is the string, which as if it dipped loosely into a wave of treasure brings up pearls sticking to it. Poor Murphy is in the glumps, owing to Leonard's fiery harshness—each of which epithets he would most certainly deny. She has no string dipping into the green wave: things don't connect for her; & add up into those entrancing bundles which are happiness. And my days are likely to be strung with them. I like this London life in early summer—the street sauntering & square haunting, & then if my books (I never speak of L.'s pamphlet) were to be a success; if we could begin building at Monks, & put up wireless for Nelly, & get the Skeats to live at Shanks' cottage—if—if—if—What will happen is *some* intensities of pleasure, some profound plunges of gloom. Bad reviews, being ignored; & then some delicious clap of compliment. But really what I should like would be to have £3 to buy a pair of rubber soled boots, & go for country walks on Sundays.

One thing in considering my state of mind now, seems to me beyond dispute, that I have at last, bored down into my oil well, & can't scribble fast enough to bring it all to the surface.

Translation (2016)

Segunda, 20 de abril

Felicidade é ter um pequeno cordão onde as coisas se prendem por si. Por exemplo, visitar a minha costureira na Judd Street, ou melhor, pensar em um vestido que eu poderia encomendar para ela e imaginá-lo pronto – este é o cordão, que, se languidamente mergulhado em uma onda de tesouros, traria para cima pérolas grudadas nele. A pobre da Murphy está emburrada, graças à rispidez enérgica de Leonard – dois epítetos que ele com certeza negaria. Ela não possui cordão nenhum para mergulhar na onda verde: as coisas não se conectam para ela; nem se avolumam nesses feixes fascinantes que são a felicidade. E meus dias provavelmente estarão repletos deles. Gosto dessa vida londrina de início do verão – de perambular pelas ruas, demorar-se nas praças, e se meus livros (não falo do panfleto de L.) forem um sucesso; se pudermos começar a construir em Monks, e instalar um rádio para Nelly, e convencer os Skeats a morar no chalé de Shanks – se – se – se – *Algumas* intensidades de prazer aconteceriam, alguns profundos mergulhos de melancolia. Resenhas ruins, ser ignorada; em seguida alguns deliciosos aplausos elogiosos. Mas o que eu realmente gostaria era de ter £3 para comprar um par de botas com solado de borracha e caminhar pelo campo nos domingos.

Uma coisa a levar em consideração em meu estado de espírito agora, e que me parece inquestionável, é que por fim atingi meu poço de petróleo e não consigo escrever rápido o bastante para trazer tudo até a superfície.

Second version

Source text established by Anne Olivier-Bell, published in 1978-1983, and modified in 2017 by me after comparing it to the 1925 manuscript.

Monday, 20 April Happiness is to have a little string onto which things will attach themselves. For example, going to my dressmaker in Judd Street, or rather thinking of a dress I could get her to make, & imagining it made—that is the string, which as if it dipped loosely into a wave of treasure brings up pearls sticking to it. Poor Murphy is in the glumps, owing to Leonard's fiery harshness—each of which epithets he would most certainly deny. She has no string dipping into the green wave: things don't connect for her; & add up into those entrancing bundles which are happiness. And my days are likely to be strung with them. I like this London life in early summer—the street sauntering & square haunting, & then if my books (I never speak of L.'s pamphlet) were to be a success; if we could begin building at Monks, & put up wireless for Nelly, & get the Skeats to live at Shanks' cottage—if—if—if—What will happen is *some* intensities of pleasure, some profound plunges of gloom. Bad reviews, being ignored; & then some delicious clap of compliment. But really what I should like would be to have £3 to buy a pair of rubber soled boots, & go for country walks on Sundays. One thing in considering my state of mind now, seems to me beyond dispute, that I have at last, bored down into my oil well, & can't scribble fast enough to bring it all to the surface.

Translation (2017)

Segunda, 20 de abril Felicidade é ter um fiozinho onde as coisas podem se prender. Por exemplo, ir à minha modista na Judd Street, ou melhor, pensar num vestido que gostaria que ela fizesse & imaginá-lo pronto – este é o fio que, mergulhado de leve numa onda de tesouros, ao ser puxado de volta traz pérolas. A coitada da Murphy está macambúzia graças à rispidez ferina de Leonard – epítetos que ele certamente negaria, ambos. Ela não tem fio nenhum para mergulhar na onda verde: para ela as coisas não se conectam umas às outras; não se avolumam nos montinhos fascinantes que constituem a felicidade. Já os meus dias provavelmente estarão repletos deles. Eu gosto dessa vida londrina do início do verão – bater perna nas ruas & bater ponto nas praças, & depois, se meus livros (nem falo da brochura de L.) forem um sucesso; se pudermos começar a reforma em Monks, & instalar um rádio para Nelly, & fazer os Skeats [não identificados] irem morar na casa de Shanks – se – se – se – O que vai acontecer são *algumas* intensidades de prazer, & alguns profundos mergulhos na tristeza. Resenhas ruins, ser ignorada; & depois uns deliciosos aplausos elogiosos. Mas sinceramente o que eu mais gostaria seria de ter £3 para comprar um par de botas com solado de borracha & fazer caminhadas pelo campo aos domingos. Uma coisa a considerar em meu estado de espírito agora, que me parece indisputável, é que finalmente perfurei o meu próprio poço, & não consigo rabiscar com rapidez o bastante para trazer tudo até a superfície.

In the 2017 version of the text, I opted to emulate the speed, the rhythm, the sonority, the strangeness, the interpretational challenges, and the impact of Virginia Woolf's diary writing. To convey the speed in which she wrote, I chose to maintain the ampersand (&), despite the fact that, had she written the diary in Portuguese, this would not make much sense, since *and* translates for a single letter in that language, *e*. This constitutes, therefore, an example of a foreignization choice in a translation that also aimed to be as close as possible to the source.

The 2017 version, moreover, favored the use of Brazilian affective terms (such as the diminutive “fiozinho”, which denotes tenderness, instead of “pequeno cordão”, my first, and more impersonal, translational choice). It also, at times, resorted to lexis spoken in the Northeast region of Brazil, rather than the one spoken in the Southeast (mainly Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo), the country's economic center of gravity. The reason for that is my own origin: I come from Bahia, in the Northeast, and in many occasions the “preferred”, “formalized” Southeastern version of Brazilian Portuguese failed to offer the translational choice I considered to be more fit, according to my interpretation of the text. For instance, the expression “in the gumps” was ultimately translated as “macambúzia”, whereas in the first version it had been translated as “emburrada”, a much more neutral option. “Macambúzia” strikes me as having a stronger connotation in comparison with “emburrada”, denoting a more profound and intense

sentiment of exasperation. It is noteworthy that this sort of affective decisions set into movement elements which are not the “preferred” ones in terms of translational choices, because of their being marked with a “regional” tag. In doing so, as a side effect, they put into question Brazilian language hierarchization and linguistic privilege due to the creation of new *loci* of enunciation in a canonic text, and thus of new *possible* readings of it.

If, as discussed, in undecidability we have at play multiple perspectives of denotation, instead of a mere attempt of reproducing meaning or attempting to copy, the possibility of translating “in the glumps” as “macambúzia” and not as “emburrada” or even “chateada” was already at play from the onset. Moreover, if we then move away from the concept of “ideal translatorial decisions” which eliminate all the others that were not chosen, and enter the terrain of undecidability, we will consequently also dispute “ideal” ways of reading a text and, therefore, of interpreting and translating it. A Brazilian reader who is used to reading canonical texts in translation is also used to finding in them the lexis of the Southern region of the country, for it is what is considered to be “neutral”.¹⁷ But when this reader is suddenly confronted with the use of non-preferred lexis in a translation of a canonic writer and of a non-regionalist text, when they are confronted in such a context with a term like “macambúzia”, they will invoke, even if unintentionally, the “preferred” term(s) in a net of possible terms, and maybe even “translate” it into those preferred words (“chateada”, “emburrada”). For all these possibilities hemorrhage into each other, contaminate each other. And if this movement of dislocation is not frequent enough to generate a new comforting logic, it will then create a certain estrangement. The translation is carried on in *différance* that is not set by the source text, but by a movement artificially inserted in the translation.

I would like to call attention to two other options that operated micro-interventions in the target text and that also collaborate to move meanings. The first one was translating “owing to Leonard’s fiery harshness” as “graças à rispidez ferina de Leonard”, instead of “devido à” or “por causa da”, decisions that would be more mimetic to the term “owing to”. This option added a micro-ambivalence in the target text, for “graças a” *also* evokes a benign idea, similar to “thanks to”, rather than one simply limited to causality. The intention was to emphasize Woolf’s irony, which is seen throughout her diary, although especially when she narrates interactions with people who worked for the Woolfs.¹⁸

The second was rendering “the street sauntering & square haunting” as “bater perna nas ruas & bater ponto nas praças” instead of “perambular pelas ruas, demorar-se nas praças”. In doing so, I sought to preserve the rhythm of the source text and its alliteration: in the source, the sounds of “s”, “r” and “t”; in the target, the alliteration of “p” (ponto/perna/praça) and the repetition of the verb “bater” (a verb that already brings within it the denotation of repetitiveness). Also worthy of notice, though, is that the expression “bater perna nas ruas” is a veiled reference to Leonardo Fróes’ translation of Woolf’s essay “Street Haunting: a London Adventure” as “Batendo pernas nas ruas: Uma aventura em Londres”. Inscribing a layer of meaning which is absent from the source text, this decision contributed to making the translation porous.

Lastly, while the artificial paragraph inserted in the edited version of Woolf’s diary was preserved in my first translation, it was eliminated in the second.

SOME APPROXIMATIONS TO RECENT LITERARY THEORY

Even if they do not use the term *affect* nor any of its correlates (emotions, feelings etc.), recent developments in literary theory have pursued a line of thought that also takes into consideration affects and subjectivities. Laurent Zimmerman (2013), for instance, emphasizes not a distancing position of a critic from their object in the name of impartial objectivity (which is ultimately impossible), but rather a *positioning* from the critic, with their subjectivity. In other words, he demands that the critic’s perspective be shown. “With this aspect of criticism, the produced discourse [...] must be determined by the work and not constituted in a sort of indifference to it”, he argues. It would be a matter of offering a reading that expands the invention produced by the work, “one that doesn’t provide an x-ray of it, but rather places it in an echo chamber, where the modification of the

17 Although we could problematize this statement by asking “considered by whom?”, which is a much-needed discussion, it would be out of the scope of this text.

18 The way she often described them using the word “poor” to feign compassion, combined with posterior harsh criticism of their attitude, denotes this, as it can be seen in this entry. Whereas at first I opted for the more literal “pobre” to translate “poor”, I then decided to replace it for “a coitada”, which sounds more ironic.

relationship with language and the imagination it proposes continues to unfold” (ZIMMERMAN, 2013, p. 194, my translation).¹⁹

Zimmerman sees criticism as a creative and transforming revision of the very relationship we establish with knowledge, believing that, by mingling objectivity and subjectivity, an analytical act that can emphasize the *writing* possibilities of a text could be generated. This is a creative perspective of criticism which seems to join sides with literary translation, especially when we consider its relation to the affect turn. In a similar way, in “Da tradução como criação e crítica” (1962), Brazilian poet, critic, and translator Haroldo de Campos states that the literary translator should devise a project that criticizes the target text while simultaneously creatively *reviews* it, in order to fit it in the translator's own historical time. It is in these terms that Campos thinks of criticism via translation: the source text should be pored over so that the translator could *recreate* it in another language and context. Much like Zimmerman, Campos does not explicitly mention affection; nevertheless, his “transcreation” proposal implicitly calls for the subjectivity of the translator in order to be successful.

In “A Sketch of the Past”, a long, unfinished essay and one of the last texts written by Virginia Woolf, she discusses the elements of a good memoir or biography. Faced with the desire to write her own, she observes that despite reading many memoirs, most are failures, because they merely describe events and leave out the person to whom they happened. In other words, the writer seems to be unaffected by the individual about whom they are writing.

Here I come to one of the memoir writer's difficulties – one of the reasons why, though I read so many, so many are failures. They leave out the person to whom things happened. (...) And the events mean very little unless we know first to whom they happened. (WOOLF, 1985, p. 65)

In a slight twist of Sara Ahmed's statement that happiness puts us into intimate contact with things, I postulate that it is instead *affect* that does that, by adding a subjective layer (in Woolf's terms, “the person”) to the objective one (“the events”). In literary studies, the idea of “intimate contact” mentioned by Ahmed may be transposed to translation, since it constitutes the closest perspective one can have when reading a text. Gayatri C. Spivak's text “The Politics of Translation” seems to corroborate that – while also pointing out that there must be a *willing* to be affected in order to be an intimate reader, something Spivak calls “surrendering to the text”.

No amount of tough talk can get around the fact that translation is the most intimate act of reading. Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text. (SPIVAK, 1993, p. 183)

CONCLUSION

While affects have traditionally been distrusted by all intellectual activity that is aligned with logocentrism for being considered too irrational, unscientific, or subjective, there has been a latter-day shift in the concept of rationality which now sees cognition and affect as a unity, ironically somehow incited by recent scientific discoveries. Such notion, however, had been put forth long before by philosophers such as Nietzsche and Spinoza, who, arguing against the Cartesian dualism, sustained that there is only embodied and perspective knowledge. In this article, aligned with Koskinen (2020) and Safatle (2016), I have proposed to view affect as the ability to *affect* and *be affected* by the self and others, that is, as a porosity to the interactions that all individuals are subjected to: their material and ideological contexts, and in the same extent, their inner subjectivity, with no primacies between them. I consider this understanding to be in line with Derrida's notion of undecidability, namely, the disclosing of the ambivalence in signifiers that are grounded on oppositions by noticing that the halves of the opposition do not constitute separate ideas, but are part of the whole, and that they will bring within them all the other silent possibilities (even if they are not simultaneously apparent). Derrida uncovers how undecidability is in the heart of language processes, of meaning and interpretation. Thus, I believe it can also be seen as moving literary translation.

19 “Avec cette part de la critique, le discours produit (...) devra être lui-même déterminé par l'œuvre et non pas constitué dans une sorte d'indifférence à l'œuvre (...). Il s'agira d'offrir une lecture qui prolonge l'invention produite par l'œuvre, qui n'en offre pas une radiographie, mais qui la place plutôt dans une chambre d'échos, où la modification du rapport au langage et à l'imaginaire qu'elle propose trouve à se poursuivre.”

Moreover, both the concept of rationality as traversed by affect and Derrida's undecidability are attuned to Virginia Woolf's literary crossing-over strategies, which resist to zero-one definitions and preserve ambivalence in the body of her works. I sought to show how this is particularly true in her diary because of the liminal nature of this literary genre, wedged between fact and fiction, artifice and spontaneity, the intimate and the public. I also tried to bring to the fore the implications of refusing to obliterate such ambivalence of the source text in my translation, by not reducing the text to a preconceived idea of diary, but by considering it instead in its singular literary form, placed inside the oeuvre of a writer who was very aware of her literary practices. For that purpose, I discussed some ways in which some of my own decisions as a translator may be seen as guided both by affect and by the movements of *différance* and undecidability.

Lastly, I sought to debate how, despite never explicitly alluding to affect, recent developments both in literary and translation theory have trailed in that direction, opening the possibility that the affect studies may expand these paths in the future.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST CONFLICT

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest.

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