On two versions of a Shakespeare sonnet

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MY INTEREST in Shakespeare's sonnets dates back several decades. A school notebook with the picture of three boy scouts on the cover, with the one in the middle holding an enormous Brazilian flag, standing on a pedestal where the word *Translations* was read, written in blue ink - assures me that back in 1947/1948 I was already involved with Amado Nervo, Émile Lante, Siegfried Sassoon, Manuel González Prada, Baudelaire (*L'homme et la mer*), the Spanish Anonymous (*No me mueve, mi Dios*) and ... Shakespeare: nothing less than Sonnet XXIX, translated in Alexandrine verses

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone, beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself, and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, - and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

(First translation in Alexandrine verses)

Quando, longe da vista humana e da fortuna,
Choro, triste e sozinho, ao ver-me desterrado,
E o surdo céu meu pranto inútil importuna,
Eu olho para mim a maldizer meu fado,

Querendo ser alguém mais rico de esperança,
Parecer com esse alguém, ter amigos serenos,

Desejando-lhe a sorte, os intentos que alcança,
E, do que mais aspiro, estar contente, ao menos;
Ainda, nesse pensar, quase me desprezando,
Recordo-me de vós, retorna-me a alegria
E ponho-me feliz, como a calhandra, entoando

Hinos ao claro céu, cá da terra sombria;
Pois só de em vós pensar, tão rico me fazeis
Que o meu destino, então, não dou pelo de reis.

Translation in decasyllables)

Se, órfão do olhar humano e da fortuna,
Choro na solidão meu pobre estado
E o céu meu pranto inútil importuna,
Eu entro em mim a maldizer meu fado;
Sonho-me alguém mais rico de esperança,
Quero feições e amigos mais amenos,
Deste o pendor, a meta que outro alcança,
Do que mais amo contentado o menos.
Mas, se nesse pensar, que me magoa,
De ti me lembro acaso – o meu destino,
Qual cotovia na alvorada entoa
Da negra terra aos longes céus um hino.
E na riqueza desse amor que evoco,
Já minha sorte com a dos reis não troco.

What draws my attention today in that first attempt is the arrangement of the verses, in the Petrarchan sonnet style, perhaps because I was not familiar at the time with the British notation, which contradicted my structural notion of a sonnet. I probably found the English original in a textbook and copied it like that, although I disagreed with it or thought it was mistaken. As a result, in the translation I "restored" the usual form of the two quatrains and two triplets, without which, for the translator of back then, it would not be possible to produce a sonnet. However, there are some solutions in those verses that have always pleased me, especially the first line, "*Quando, longe da vista humana e da fortuna*" (When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes), in which the phrase "in disgrace" from the original (equivalent to "without the graces, without the favor, without the consideration of men") was synthesized in the adverb "*longe*" (out of) sight, which evoked me the old saying "*longe dos olhos, longe do coração"* (out of sight, out of mind). Later, when rearranging the verses in decasyllables for its publication in a book, I ended up choosing "*órfão*" (orphan), which

conveyed the idea of abandonment, absence, distance, and fit the number of syllables that I needed. In the second verse I found in "*desterrado*" the same concept of "outcast" and "I all alone beweep" is appropriately transposed as "*choro triste e sozinho*," (sad and lonely weep), and "sad" here can correspond to reinforcement (bolt), represented in English by the adverb "all". The decasyllable version was less fortunate: "*meu pobre estado*" (my poor condition) is far from evoking the "outcast" of the original, and the adjective "poor" is actually very poor in this verse. The third verse reproduces precisely the meaning of the English text in both Alexandrines and decasyllables, but the first version is more comprehensive, as it maintains the adjective "*surdo céu*" (deaf heaven) that I had to sacrifice in the decasyllable version. The phrase "*pranto inútil importuna*" is a good translation for "trouble ... bootless cries", and provides a very rich rhyme for the word "*fortuna*" in the first verse. "*Eu olho para mim a maldizer meu fado*" corresponds linearly to "I look upon myself and curse my fate," and was improved - thanks to my foray into reading classic texts on the occasion of the decasyllabic transposition- to "*Eu entro em mim a maldizer meu fado*", of a pseudo-Camonian flavor. Whereas the fifth verse succeeds in staying close to the original in both versions, in the sixth, by virtue of the rhyme, there is a considerable diversion: the original speaks of "having friends" (with friends possess'd), but the versions "add" to the noun friends the adjectives "*serenos*" (serene) or "*amenos*" (affable). The seventh verse says literally in the original, "*desejando (ter) a arte de um (dos amigos) ou o objetivo (de outro deles*") (desiring this man's art, and that man's scope)." In the first version, the pronoun *lhe* is equivalent to these desired friends, but the art of one of them turns into "*sorte*" (luck/fate), although "*os intentos que alcança*" corresponds roughly to "that man's scope". The decasyllabic version was more fortunate with "*deste o pendor, a meta que outro alcança*" (desiring this man's art, and that man's scope), restoring the alternation of the qualities of both friends. The eighth verse is more difficult even in its interpretation; in prosaic terms it would be something like "minimally contented with what I appreciate the most", which, according to A. L. Rowse may be a reference to Shakespeare's profession as an actor: "It is possible that in his moments of depression he felt unhappy with what gave him more pleasure: acting." This idea does not occur in the initial version, but is very close to the *decasyllabic version*: "*Do que mais amo contentado o menos*" (With what I most enjoy contented least), including maintaining the *mais/menos* opposition of the original (most/least). The ninth verse of the Alexandrine translation maintains the verb *desprezar* (despising), while the decasyllabic version, by virtue of rhyme, turns despise into *magoar* (hurt). Next come the beautiful verses, which literally mean: "*Ainda em meio a esses pensamentos, a ponto de me desprezar, por sorte penso em ti, e então o meu estado (de ânimo) como a cotovia, ao raiar do dia, da soturna terra, ergue (cantando) hinos às portas do céu.*" (Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising, haply I think on thee, - and then my state, like to the lark at break of day arising from sullen earth, sings hymns

at heaven's gate). Both versions seek to follow the lines of the original, but it is curious to note that in the first version the Portuguese word for lark was *calhandra/ calandra* (mockingbird), and in the other *cotovia* (lark). Why would I have used the word *calhandra* (mockingbird)? Probably because, at the time, I though it was more "classic". The final couplet is a touchstone: "*Pois teu doce amor lembrado (pois a recordação de teu doce amor) me traz tamanha riqueza que eu então não me digno de trocar meu estado (minha situação) com (os) reis.*" (For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings that then I scorn to change my state with kings). In the initial version I used "*vós*" to translate thy, but in the *decasyllabic version* (and throughout the book, incidentally), I chose "*tu*" (thee), a pronoun that today, due to the predominance of you (*você*) can even have a somewhat archaizing connotation. "*Tão rico me fazeis*" in the first version is a good equivalent to "such wealth brings" and is more direct than the decasyllabic "*na riqueza desse amor que evoco*"; the end rhyme (kings/ *reis*) is more expressive than *evoco/troco*, although these final decasyllabic verses are quite fluent in Portuguese. I the first version the original *state* became *destino* (fate), while in the second, for the purpose of reducing the number of syllables, it was translated as *sorte* (also fate or luck). A small problem: in the first version I avoided using *dos reis* (of the kings) to avoid using a anthroponym, a concern that was eliminated in the decasyllabic version. In both cases the phrase "scorn to change", which is more meaningful than the direct "*não dou /não troco*", was ignored.

Without nostalgia I conclude that the first translation can be equated to the final one, which was rendered two or three decades later.

In the late 1950s I probably had already completed four or five, which game me sort of a free pass into the pages of the "Sunday Supplement" of Jornal do Brazil newspaper, under the aegis of Mario Faustino and Reynaldo Jardim. Among those was sonnet LXXI ("*Não lamentes por mim quando eu morrer*"/ "No longer mourn for me when I am dead"), which won me an accolade from Manuel Bandeira.

The phase of systematic work, in the sense of translating a considerable number of them, only occurred in the Netherlands in the years 1968/1970, when I was faced for the first time with a complete collection of 154 sonnets, in a bilingual edition (English/Dutch) translated by W. van Elden, whom my shyness did not stop me from meeting. It was in the translation of his preface that I realized the difficulties facing a translator who, in any language, attempted to translate the Shakespearean sonnets while maintaining their rhythm, wordplay, polysemy and double meanings, a sometimes classic and others popular vocabulary, the richness of environments, colors, tones, not to mention the peculiar metaphors and formal features which work as Gestalt elements. Says Van Elden:

> Shakespeare managed to extract from the sonnet form all it could give. Through endless metric variations and the use of all poetic devices such as alliteration, internal rhymes, antitheses, repetitions and puns, he achieved an almost unattainable result. And all this with such ease and naturalness that technical resources may even pass unnoticed to those who do not look for them specifically.

The Dutch weather will certainly have contributed to the obsession with "elaborating on" the translation of the sonnets until I succeeded in maintaining as many of their elements as possible, the order of propositions, the stylistic features, without giving up their poetic transit through the territory of the Portuguese language. Another publication from that time - actually a notepad (*100 vel prima houtvrij schrijfpapier met lynen*), attests to the outrageous number of attempts to transpose a single verse, such as the first translation of Sonnet I (From fairest creatures we desire increase) with its alliteration in *ff*, followed by an assonance in *crea* - to reach the equivalent "*Dos seres ímpares ansiamos prole*" (*se/si* and *pa/pro*) because sometimes I succeeded in having the alliteration but with a discrepancy in rhyme, and others the first would not fit the metric, not to mention our permanent refusal of circumlocutions or transpositions.

Photo by France Presse

William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

From Holland I brought 24 sonnets, which once revised were published by Nova Fronteira in a luxurious book aimed at bibliophiles in 1973. In my second sojourn in Europe, passing through England, the obsession continued, but then compounded by a considerable number of critical instruments, with the intent of increasing the number of plays translated to thirty for a commercial edition that was published in 1991. At that point I was already familiar with complete renowned translations such as Oxford's (ed. W.J. Craig) and Pelican's (ed.

Douglas Bush), as well as with authors as crucial as Stephan Booth, W. G. Ingram and Theodore Redpath, John Dover Wilson, Kenneth Muir, Robert Giroux and A. L. Rowse, with their explanatory notes and comments, besides the production of texts. The precious little book Shakespeare's Wordplay, by M. M. Mahood, revealed the hidden intentions and verbal subtleties that certainly would have escaped me without its help. And the rare gem, whose notes represented a kind of bible of the Sonnets – which I had looked for in all major used rare bookstores - *A New Variorum Edition* – of which I only got a photocopy at the Royal Library of Stockholm in the late 1980s. There was also the obsession with examining the largest possible number of translations, especially the French ones, starting from François-Victor Hugo's, which I first set eyes on still back in Brazil. But France reserved me a big disappointment in the person of Henri Meschonnic, a highly praised professor from Sorbonne, with his book *Poétique du traduire* (Verdier, 1999), in which he mercilessly lists eight French translations of Sonnet XXVII ("Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed"), in a period ranging from 1887 to 1992. After crushing all his predecessors, Meschonnic presents *his* version which, far from perfect – let alone poetic - flies past the magnificent wordplay in the 4th verse, in which Shakespeare plays with the nuances of work as a verb and as a noun ("To work my mind, when body's work's expir'd") and that he clumsily translated as "*Que le corps epuisé, l´esprit ravage.*" Theoretical knowledge not always ensures a poetic outcome...

Throughout all the years we have been devoting ourselves to the transposition of these immortal verses, while on the one hand we almost always had the feeling of incompleteness, the frustration of not achieving the desired similarity, the same richness and elevation of tone that prevails in the original, on the other sometimes we felt the joy of having produced one or another verse that mirrored a satisfactory moment of our own poetic achievement.

Abstract – The author starts out with a comparative analysis of two translations he made of William Shakespeare's Sonnet XXIX – the first in Alexandrines, the second in decasyllables – over a period of nearly 20 years. He concludes by explaining the various stages his work went through and the process of learning and becoming acquainted with Shakespeare's oeuvre up to its current shape.

Keywords: Translator, Translation, William Shakespeare, Comparative analysis.

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