BENEATH THE VEIL OF SPEECH: ON TRANSLATING ALAN MOORE'S *THE COURTYARD* AND *NEONOMICON*

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ABSTRACT: This article is a case-study of a rather unique translation problem faced during the translation of Alan Moore's and Jacen Burrows's comic book series *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* from English into Brazilian Portuguese. After a brief exposition of the intertextual aspects relating to Moore's countless references to Lovecraft in these series, the exploration of language as a major stylistic device is established with reference to Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology. There follows an in-depth discussion of the translation problems elicited by Moore's remarkable use of language and meta-language as a plot device. Hofstadter's concepts of pressure and slippability are introduced and contextualized as a viable approach to the practice of creative translation as defined by Kußmaul (2007). The published translation is presented and analyzed, and a conclusion is drawn with regard to the general practice of literary translation and creative literary translation in particular.
KEYWORDS: Alan Moore, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, Literary Translation, Creative Translation, Graphic Narratives.

1. Introduction

This article is a retrospective case-study of a rather unique translation problem faced during the translation of Alan Moore's and Jacen Burrows's comic book series *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* from English into Brazilian Portuguese, which I completed in the year 2012.

At the time, having already organized, translated and prefaced several volumes of H. P. Lovecraft's fiction – an inspiration so constant and so present in every page of *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* that it would be all but impossible to discuss Moore's and Burrows's creations without making almost ceaseless references to Lovecraft and his work – I was commissioned to translate and write a short introduction for a single-volume trade paperback that would collect both series to be published in Brazil under the name *Neonomicon*. It was this commission that led me to the remarkable translation problem discussed in this article.

I will be the first one to acknowledge the limitations of this attempt to piece together the complex and opaque cognitive processes which resulted in a creative translation finished almost a decade ago. However, I am also confident that the highly unusual character of the translation problem, the compound layers of pressures to be overcome in this particular case and the central position occupied by the problem in the overarching structure of the narrative have all concurred to make a lasting impression. As a result, the account offered here should be at least sufficiently accurate to be of interest. Even if that were not the case, translator practitioners know from experience that a perfectly literal presentation of things is often far less interesting and far less relevant than a purpose-driven re-presentation of those same things. It is in this spirit that I trust the following

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behind-the-curtain look into the reconstructed mental process of approaching and solving the translation problem at the heart of both *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* might illustrate one of several possible ways to approach broad-ranging, plot-related explorations of language in creative translation.

2. Lovecraft and Moore, Cthulhu and *fhtagn*

This article does not purport to be a presentation of either H. P. Lovecraft or Alan Moore: it would not be possible to present the work of these authors in a few short paragraphs, particularly because of the complex intertextual aspects of Moore's *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* discussed below. Given the breadth and the sheer number of direct and indirect references to Lovecraft, these comic book series call for a reader with significant previous knowledge of Lovecraft in order to be fully appreciated. Nonetheless, it appears convenient to offer at least a cursory survey of the relevant details in order to make the translation-related aspects at least intelligible to those who might not be familiar with these authors and their work.

Howard Philips Lovecraft (1890-1937) was an American writer of weird fiction who is best remembered for classic horror and early science-fiction stories such as "The Call of Cthulhu" and *At the Mountains of Madness,* among several others. Having been mostly ignored by the prevailing literary movement during his lifetime, Lovecraft was nonetheless able to find an avid and loyal readership in cheap, mass-produced magazines during the golden era of American pulp fiction (1920s-1940s). Over time, he became one of the most iconic figures in the history of horror and sci-fi literature and currently enjoys cult status – not least because of the countless adaptations, references and homages inspired by his work, among which are Moore's *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon.*

Alan Moore (born in 1953) is a British writer and ranks among the most important creators in the history of comic books. Moore was responsible for ground-breaking original works such as *Watchmen* (first serialized in 1986-1987) and *V for Vendetta* (1982-1988) as well as for invaluable contributions to preexisting comic book characters such as DC Comics' Swamp Thing. His work often features a masterly use of language as well as an intricate web of intertextual references – so that even the simplest attempt to explain *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* requires a certain degree of intertextuality, since Moore has in fact produced not one but two works entitled *The Courtyard.* The first was a short story published in 1994, based on Lovecraft's poem of the same name (poem IX from the sonnet-cycle *Fungi From Yuggoth).* Moore's second *The Courtyard* came out in 2003 – this time as a comic book with a sequential adaptation by Antony Johnston and artwork by Jacen Burrows, published in two 24-page issues. In 2010 this serial adaptation was followed by *Neonomicon,* originally written by Moore in the comic book format as a direct continuation of the events presented in *The Courtyard* and published in four 25-page issues, once again with artwork by Jacen Burrows. In both of these works, references to Lovecraft are so prevalent and so frequent that even the characters describe the in-story references as "almost like some big literary in-joke".

In view of the aforementioned space constraints, it also becomes rather challenging to properly convey the sense of pervasive horror which several of Lovecraft's stories associate with Cthulhu – the central figure in a pseudo-mythology initially developed by Lovecraft and mentioned by name in one of his most often quoted passages:

> *Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.*

The in-story translation – which reads "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming" – hints at the imminent rising of Cthulhu, a cosmic creature which slumbers on the bottom of the ocean and whose awakening is vaguely associated with humanity's ultimate demise:

> Cthulhu still lives, too, I suppose, again in that chasm of stone which has shielded him since the sun was young. His accursed city is sunken once more (…) ; but his ministers on earth still bellow and prance and slay around idol-capped monoliths in lonely places. He must have been trapped by the sinking whilst within his black abyss, or else the world would by now be screaming with fright and frenzy. Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men. (Lovecraft, 2005)

For the purposes of this article, the infamous line from "The Call of Cthulhu" also serves as a piece of textual evidence which fittingly depicts Lovecraft's fictional use of pseudo-language as an important stylistic device. In addition to original pseudo-language creations – of which "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn" is only the most notorious example – Lovecraft also borrowed cryptic words from other writers of the uncanny such as Edgar Allan Poe, whose bizarre coinage "tekeli-li" (from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket)* reappears at key moments in Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness,* and Arthur Machen, whose mysterious and unexplained coinage "Aklo" (from "The White People") is cursorily mentioned in Lovecraft's *The Dunwich Horror* before it assumes a central role in the plot of *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* as a sort of archaic transcendental language.

The text on the pages which brings *The Courtyard* to a close is a telling example of the extent to which this strange use of language – or rather, this use of a strange pseudo-language – permeates the universe in which Moore's characters move:

> **Panel 1.** [Aldo Sax is in front of a window with blood on his arms.]
>
> Aldo Sax (in narrative boxes): N'GAII FHTAGN E'HUCUNECHH R'LYEH. IA, G-HARNE EP YGG RHAN TEGOTH N'THYLEII YR GNH'GUA? / SHAGGAI, HUMUK DHO-HNA, G'YLL-GNAII YGG YR NHHNGR SHOGGOTH, HRR YLL'NGNGR NYARLATHOTEP. GH'LL MHHG-GTHAA TEKELI-LI Y'GOLONAC RRRTHNAA. / H'RRNAI CTHULHU. H'RRNAI CTHULHU NNG'GTEP...

The fact that the two final pages of a short, two-issue comic series are used to present the very end of the story in mostly incomprehensible[1] text is, without a doubt, proof of the importance given to language in both *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* – and these outré warpings become even more entrenched further on.

3. Johnny Carcosa's speech problem

In *The Courtyard,* as part of the ongoing investigation by the FBI, undercover agent Aldo Sax meets the strange Johnny Carcosa in an attempt to get Aklo – believed at this point of the narrative to be a sort of drug. Right at the beginning of the exchange between these two characters, the text in Carcosa's speech bubbles enacts a speech problem:

> **Panel 2.** [Aldo Sax is standing in front of Johnny Carcosa at the Club Zothique. Carcosa has a yellow bandana covering his nose and mouth.]
>
> Aldo Sax: "SORRY TO ITCH YOU, MAN. JOEY FACE SAID I SHOULD TALK TO YOU IF I WAS LOOKING FOR ANYTHING."
> Johnny Carcosa: "JOEY FATHE ITH AN ATH-HOLE WHO TAKTH TOO MUCH ECTHTATHY."
> Aldo Sax: "WATCHU WANN', ANYWAYTH?"
> Aldo Sax (in a narrative box): WHEN HE SPEAKS, THOUGH YOU CAN'T SEE HIS LIPS, A FAINT RIPPLE OF BREATH STIRS THE SHEER LEMON FILM OF HIS VEIL.

Though at this point in the narrative Carcosa's lisp is not referred to in other way aside from the spelling of *s* as *th* exemplified above, it is important to note that the character's lisp is enacted in all of his speech bubbles at all times. However, a later scene in which Aldo Sax arranges to meet Johnny Carcosa at his place in order to receive the Aklo offers the reader a direct insight into the FBI agent's impression of Carcosa'a speech problem by means of a narrative box:

> **Panel 3.** [Johnny Carcosa is standing in a hallway, looking back. He has a yellow bandana covering his nose and mouth.]
>
> Aldo Sax (in a narrative box): IT OCCURS TO ME MAYBE HE HAS A HARE LIP OR SOME SIMILAR ORAL COMPLAINT, THUS EXPLAINING BOTH CARCOSA'S FAGGOTY LISP AND HIS YELLOW, CONCEALING BANDANA.

Both Carcosa's lisp and the uncertain nature of Sax's impression as to the reason for this speech problem – together with the fact that Carcosa uses a "yellow, concealing bandana"

[1] When read in context within the frame of reference established by Lovecraft's writings and Moore's appropriation, the quoted passage does in fact have a performative meaning, even if it cannot be translated so as to yield a complete and coherent linguistic meaning.

in all of his appearances – are important aspects of both the translation problem and the solution to the translation problem discussed below.[2]

4. A language barrier in translation

The apparently trivial fact that Johnny Carcosa has a lisp and that his speech bubbles graphically enact this speech problem by employing *th* to represent /θ/ whenever there should normally be an *s* to represent /s/ constitutes a significant translation problem for a translator working into Brazilian Portuguese.

Even though there are Brazilian speakers of Portuguese who speak with a lisp, the noun "ceceio" (lisp) and the verb "cecear" (to lisp) are quite specialized words whose frequency in Portuguese is statistically so much lower than that of their English counterparts[3] that simply using them would feel rather unnatural, even if the reader happens to know what the words mean. There are hardly any other ways of even referring to the problem without long circumlocutions or downright imitation of the problem – at least in informal language, as is the case here. Even more significantly, the sound /θ/ does not exist at all in standard Portuguese pronunciation, so that the mere existence of this sound in speech already implies a speech problem. As a result, there is no way to represent a lisp by means of *ad hoc* or non-standard spelling in Portuguese either.

At this point, I would like to refer to two concepts presented by Douglas R. Hofstadter in *The Search for Essence 'twixt Medium and Message* (1997) – respectively, *pressure* and *slippability.* While discussing the various aspects of a text that make up its very core – the whole *point of the text* to be reenacted in translation, one might say, be it formal, performative or otherwise – Hofstadter (1997, p. 199) writes:

> None of these comes close to providing a recipe for what to do; each one only constitutes a guideline, or **pressure,** as I like to put it... One might very well ask whether a reasonable translator would ever – or should ever – feel compelled to go this far in dissecting a passage to be transported to another language. How much can one expect from a translator? Well, let me remind readers that although on its surface this article is largely about translation, it is more deeply about *essence,* and so the question as first stated is perhaps not quite on the mark. My primary purpose here is not to castigate or to praise anyone; it is simply to point out how sharply the act of translation cuts to the core of a written passage. (Emphasis in the original)

In the dilemma posed by Johnny Carcosa's speech, both the lack of an everyday Portuguese word for "lisp" and the impossibility of even representing a lisp (which might otherwise

[2] The prejudice evidenced by Sax's use of the adjective "faggoty" to refer to Carcosa lies beyond the scope of this article, but the use of hate speech as an in-story treatment of Lovecraft's stances (both in fiction as well as in personal writings) could be discussed at length in an article devoted to this particular aspect of the text.
[3] As of the writing of this article, a Google search returns 20,600 and 13,000 matches for "he lisps" and "she lisps" against only 303 and 5 for "ele ceceia" and and "ela ceceia". When the noun is used, the difference in frequency becomes even more striking: "he has a lisp" and "she has a lisp" return 83,400 and 287,000 results, whereas "ele tem ceceio" and "ela tem ceceio" return the single-digit figures of 5 and 3, respectively.

have been a viable solution even if it were never referred to by name) constitute concomitant pressures.

With regard to *slippability,* Hofstadter (1997, p. 202) defines it as:

> (…) the degree of mutability of some aspect of a passage to be translated. Something is slippable provided its disappearance will not seriously threaten the essence of the structure it has heretofore belonged to. Another way of describing it is to say that a highly slippable item is an expendable item, one that will be among the first to go when times get though. It is the "fat in the budget" – even when you think there is *no* fat in the budget.

In short, the concept of *pressure* refers to each one of the cumulative layers of translation problems elicited by a set of salient characteristics of the original text, whereas *slippability* is a descriptor for the aspects of the text which can be changed or discarded in order to allow for the *essence* (in Hofstadter's words) or the *point of the text* (as I have called it above) to be preserved or reenacted in translation.

Needless to say, the *point of the text* is very often not the literal meaning of the text, and this is particularly true in texts where words are not only informative, but also performative, such as expressive texts. As we shall see later on, this is precisely the case with the speech problem at hand: Carcosas's lisp is all but contingent – it is in fact used as a core stylistic device with large-scale impact on the entire narrative, as detailed in the next section.

5. The plot sickens

Apart from the lack of a usable word to refer to a lisp in Portuguese and the lack of a way to represent it in translation in the context of *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon*, Moore's text contains a third pressure with all-encompassing consequences for the entire *point of the text* considered as a cohesive whole. The story plot is far too convoluted and contains far too many Lovecraftian references to be presented in detail,[4] but the important aspects which account for the resulting *pressure* are the following: at a certain point in *Neonomicon,* FBI agent Merril Brears is raped by a Deep One – a monstrous sea-creature taken straight from Lovecraft's novelette *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. During the rape scene, Brears enters a delirium-like state in which she speaks to Johnny Carcosa in a strange unknown place:[5]

> **Panel 4.** [Johnny Carcosa and Merril Brears are standing on a rocky landscape with strange carvings. Carcosa has a yellow bandana covering his nose and mouth, and Brears is completely naked.]
>
> Johnny Carcosa: "ATH FOR YOUR REAL THITUATION, THITH FUCK YOU'RE HAVING, IT'TH A DEEP ONE." / "WHAT THITH ITH, ITH YOU'RE A NUN, THEE, ATHIAN MERRY?"

[4] As a character in *Neonomicon* #2 (2010) aptly puts it, "I'm saying that somehow, every element in this case is connected to the writings of H. P. Lovecraft".

[5] Afterwards revealed to be the sunken city of R'lyeh – yet another reference to Lovecraft.

> Merril Brears: "I... I'M NOT ASIAN. AND NOBODY CALLED ME 'MERRY' SINCE I WAS AT SCHOOL." / "WH-WHAT IS THIS PLACE?"

Since Brears knows Carcosa has a lisp, she makes a justified attempt to reconstruct his confusing speech, and in doing so interprets "athian" as "Asian". The result – even in the in-story context – is a complete non sequitur: at no point has Brears said or implied that she is Asian, and as such there is no reason for the reader or any of the story characters to expect that sort of comment, nor any available means to make sense of Carcosa's utterance. The fact that Brears is also nonsensically called a "nun" and "Merry" / "merry"[6] reinforces the non sequitur, given that in the larger in-story context she is recovering from a sex addiction, while in this particular scene she is being violently raped by the Deep One[7] even as she speaks to Carcosa in the delirium-like sequence. As for Carcosa, he is not at all close enough to Brears to be justified in calling her "Merry". Brears' state of utter bewilderment is made complete by the unknown scenario, which makes her ask: "Wh-what is this place?"

As it turns out, at this exact point in the delirium-sequence – unbeknownst to both Brears and the reader – Carcosa has just foretold the ominous end of the entire story, though the revelation is obscured by language and remains opaque to Brears (and likely to the reader, too).

On a later scene, during a visit to a now incarcerated Sax towards the end of the series, Brears tells him that she "had to repeat [Carcosa's words] to [herself] a few times before [she] got it", and finally adds: "Then I understood everything".

> **Panel 5.** [Merril Brears is face to face with Aldo Sax during a prison visit.]
>
> Merril Brears: "...FOR NYARLATHOTEP. YEAH. YEAH, I KNOW. AND NYARLATHOTEP, HE'S LIKE THOTH OR HERMES, RIGHT? HE'S THE MESSENGER." / "IN MY DREAMS, HE SPEAKS THIS PHRASE: 'WHAT THIS IS, IS YOU'RE A NUN, SEE, ASIAN MERRY?'" / "I HAD TO REPEAT IT TO MYSELF A FEW TIMES BEFORE I GOT IT. / THEN I UNDERSTOOD EVERYTHING."

Here, in what for all practical purposes acts as a fourth pressure on the translator, Brears offers an interpretative key by letting the reader know that the meaning of those words can possibly be grasped if one repeats them to oneself enough times – not a trifling cue by any means, since the intended meaning is never made explicit at any point in the original text. As I wrote in the introduction to the Brazilian edition (2012, p. 5):

[6] Again, this part is made even more opaque thanks to the standard use of upper case for the entire text in the speech bubbles. It is not possible to decide whether, if written in normal sentence case, the text should be rendered as "Merry" (personal noun – a nickname of "Merril", Brears' first name) or "merry" (adjective – as in "She is a merry child"). The fact that this passage is a non sequitur and that later on its in-story meaning will be shown to have nothing to do with either "merry" or "Merry" makes it difficult to further speculate about Brears's (mis)interpretation of Carcosa's speech.

[7] The graphic depiction of the rape scene led a librarian in Greenville, South Carolina, to ban the series from library's shelves. During the printing process for the Brazilian market, I was also informed that at least one overseas printing press refused to print the comic book, and that a new supplier had to be found.

> Whereas Lovecraft is famous for his ornate and convoluted style, here – thanks to the painstaking treatment of language which is one of Moore's trademarks – the characters experience a return to the "huge old grammatical structures" of an "ur-syntax" where "a vortex of marvellous coinage" reigns (…) In these pages, language itself becomes an essential key to reading, and there is no doubt that some of the most critical passages in the story never reveal themselves explicitly to the reader. (My translation)

Once the reader sees the image of a starry galaxy on the opening page of *Neonomicon* re-signified on the last page of the series as the walls of Brear's womb seen from the inside by the unearthly creature growing there,[8] the above lisp-free – but still nonsensical – interpretation "What this is, is you're a nun, see, Asian Merry/merry?" can be accordingly re-signified as a declarative sentence: "What this is is your annunciation, Mary". In other words, during the delirium-sequence Carcosa was telling Brears that she had become pregnant by the Deep One and was about to bring Cthulhu into the world – a dark re-enactment of Mary's begetting of Jesus.

The aspects mentioned above have an interesting effect on the reader: by reaching the end of the story, understanding what happened in purely narrative terms and reconstructing Carcosa's revelation, one has the impression of having missed the entire *point of the text* even when it was literally spelled out – with a lisp and some commas – right under one's nose.

The question then becomes how to reenact *the point of the text* in a translation to Portuguese by means of various translation strategies and slippability. As mentioned in the introduction, this is a rather strange and unique translation problem, so that no previous strategy was available: an original approach to the problem would have to be provided. This is a scenario which corresponds rather closely to Kußmaul's (2007, p. 17) definition of a creative undertaking:

> A creative undertaking originates from dissatisfaction with a given situation. The old is no longer sufficient: something **new** is created out of necessity (…) The new does not originate out of nothing (…) but rather out the **recognition of the existence of a problem.** (My translation. Emphasis in the original)

In translation, these problems "typically arise whenever a literal translation is not possible for any reason",[9] as in the case at hand.

Regardless of how difficult things may get, while engaging in creative translation the translator is of course tasked with finding a way out of any and all problems posed by the original text. As Susan Bassnett (2002, p. 44) puts it:

[8] Except for the use of quotation marks, the text on the first and the last page of *Neonomicon* is also completely identical: "IT'S THE END, AND THE BEGINNING." / "HE'S BENEATH THE WATERS NOW, BUT SOON, IN ONLY A FEW MONTHS, HE WILL COME FORTH." / "AND UNTIL THEN HE SLEEPS." / "AND DREAMS."
[9] Kußmaul, 2007, p. 30, my translation.

> It is clearly the task of the translator to find a solution to even the most daunting of problems. Such solutions may vary enormously; the translator's decisions as to what constitutes invariant information with respect to a given system of reference is in itself a creative act.

In practical terms, this amounts to successfully negotiating a transformative plan between original and translation in order to be able to contextually account for any changes in literal meaning that the exclusion or the radical transformation of expendable parts in the original might undergo in translation.

In the case of *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon,* it would seem logical to present two different but complementary sets – one containing the *pressures* exerted by the source text, which bind the translator to interlocked layers of problem-solving, and one containing the *slippable* components of the text, which (at least partly) relieve the translator from the bindings imposed by said pressures. These sets might look like the following:

Pressures:

- The character Johnny Carcosa must have a believable speech problem
- Carcosa's speech problem must be convincingly manifested in writing
- The graphic representation of Carcosa's speech problem must work in a way that obfuscates the foretold ending of the story during Brears's delirium-sequence
- The foretold ending of the story must reference the fact that Brears is portrayed as a sort of "dark Mary" who is about to bring evil into the world

Even though a list like the above might seem daunting as a set of proposed rules to solve a specific translation problem, it is also worth mentioning that the rules proposed themselves can – and often do – offer a glimpse into their own slippable components if one simply changes *must* for *might* and makes a couple of other minor adjustments, so that a list of slippabilities might look like the following:

Slippabilities:

- The character Johnny Carcosa might have any believable speech problem
- Carcosa's speech problem might be convincingly manifested any way in writing
- The graphic representation of Carcosa's speech problem might work in any way as long as it obfuscates the foretold ending of the story
- The foretold ending of the story might in any way reference the fact that Brears is presented as a sort of "dark Mary" who is about to bring evil into the world

I have already mentioned the fact that there is neither a colloquial name nor a practical way of graphically representing a lisp in Portuguese. By checking the entire text for slippable components, even though Carcosa's speech problem does not seem to be a likely candidate, specifically the lisp itself might be: any other speech problem might serve the same purpose as long as it meets the pressure requirements. An in-text justification for this approach has already been presented above without additional comments, in the panel

where Aldo Sax conjectures that "maybe [Carcosa] has a hare lip or some similar oral complaint, thus explaining both (…) [his] lisp and his yellow, concealing bandana".

While searching for slippable components, a phrase like "...or some other similar..." comes as a boon for the translator: it works as a plausible validation for the unspecificity or even wrongness of the character's own in-text interpretation. In the quoted passage, Aldo Sax is doing little more than speculating about Carcosa's problem, and in cases such as this there is no reason for the translator to refrain from taking full advantage of as ample leeway as the text might plausibly afford. As a result, I eventually decided that Carcosa's lisp (though not his speech problem) was slippable precisely *because* the Brazilian Portuguese translation was unlispable. Then I moved on to work on a solution by playing with a believable speech problem which, when read in translation, could fit the aforementioned criteria – namely, making creative use of language while employing a graphic presentation which could simultaneously obfuscate Carcosa's foreshadowing as well as be deciphered by the reader through Brears's repetition method.

The process by which a creative solution is arrived at remains at all times inaccessible to the conscious mind as a sort of black box: Kußmaul divides the creative process into four different phases (preparation, incubation, illumination and evaluation[10]), of which the two most decisive ones – incubation and illumination – are respectively defined as "combinations and reorganizations of knowledge" which "take place largely by associative and unconscious means"[11] (incubation) and "good ideas created by intuition"[12] (illumination). As such, there is no way to reconstruct the mental processes involved in coming up with a creative solution – but once the process is complete it may be subjected to the final stage of evaluation, like any other translation.

In the resulting solution I opted for graphically representing "língua presa"– a popular way of referring to a speech problem which consists in the realization of the voiced alveolar tap /ɾ/ as the voiced velar plosive /g/, so that a word such as /braˈziw/ is pronounced as /bgaˈziw/ instead. In short, the overall translation procedure for Carcosa's speech problem in the Brazilian Portuguese translation was:

> English text: /s/ → /θ/ (graphically represented by "th")
> Brazilian Portuguese text: /ɾ/ → /g/ (graphically represented by "g" or "gu" as per standard spelling conventions)

This speech problem was uniformly represented in all of Carcosa's speech bubbles in the two issues of *The Courtyard* and the four issues of *Neonomicon,* and the panel in which Carcosa foretells the end of the story to Brears was eventually printed in Brazil as below:

[10] Kußmaul, 2007, p. 58, my translation.
[11] Kußmaul, 2007, pp. 70-71, my translation.
[12] Kußmaul, 2007, p. 77, my translation.

> **Panel 7.** [Johnny Carcosa and Merril Brears are standing on a rocky landscape with strange carvings. Carcosa has a yellow bandana covering his nose and mouth, and Brears is completely naked.]
>
> Johnny Carcosa: "NA VEGDADE, VOCÊ ESTÁ TGUEPANDO COM UMA CGUIATUGA ABISSAL." / "HEH. HUMANOS E AÇÃO DE MÁ GUIA."
> Merril Brears: "QUALQUER UM SERIA MAU GUIA POR AQUI." / "Q-QUE LUGAR É ESSE?"

Here, the manifest changes in spelling responsible for enacting Carcosa's speech problem appear in "vegdade", "tguepando" and "cguiatuga" – respectively "verdade", "trepando" and "criatura" as per standard spelling conventions. A literal back-translation of the above panel into standard English spelling would thus read:

> Carcosa: "ACTUALLY, YOU'RE FUCKING A DEEP ONE." / "*HEH.* HUMANS AND LOUSY GUIDE ACTION."
> Brears: "ANYONE WOULD BE A LOUSY GUIDE AROUND HERE." / "W-WHAT IS THIS PLACE?"

Instead of having this critical non sequitur originate in Carcosa's misunderstood comment to the effect that Brears was an "Asian nun" whom he referred to as "Merry"/"merry" as in the original English text, the misunderstanding which underpins the Brazilian Portuguese translation draws on Brears's sense of being lost in an unknown, unearthly-looking place: she misunderstands Carcosa's revelation as "Humans and lousy guide action" and in turn replies, "Anyone would be a lousy guide here" – a comment further emphasized by the immediately following question, "W-what is this place?"

Far more important than making sense in the passing context of a scene which takes place during Brears's delirium-like state – which by definition would allow for all sorts of unexpected, even seemingly absurd solutions – is the fact that Carcosa's misunderstood revelation can actually be reconstrued in translation as per Brears's method of "repeating it to oneself" until one "understands everything". Apart from the three intentionally misspelled words pointed out above, at first glance the published text does not appear to include additional transformations of /r/ into /g/ because all the remaining words are entirely written in standard spelling – but in fact "Humanos e ação de má guia" (back-translated above as "Humans and lousy guide action") was arrived at by drawing on a semi-literal translation of Carcosa's never-stated "What this is is your Annunciation, Mary" as "Uma anunciação de Maria" (whose meaning would be close to "A Mary-like annunciation", though this particular construction sounds far more natural in Portuguese). Just as in the original, the translation diverts the reader's attention by focusing on what is literally written on the page by means of Brear's mistaken interpretation ("Anyone would be a lousy guide here"), whereas the unstated interpretation of "Humanos e ação de má guia" as "Uma anunciação de Maria" remains obscured by Carcosa's speech problem – thus recreating the entire *point of the text* in the passage.

This particular solution was deemed capable of addressing all the previously mentioned pressures:

- Johnny Carcosa has a speech problem
- The speech problem is graphically enacted in writing
- The graphic enacting of the speech problem allows the obfuscation of Carcosa's foretelling of the end of the story
- When appropriately reconstructed by following the in-text cues, Carcosa's apparent non sequitur can be reinterpreted as a revelation of Brears as a sort of "dark Mary"

6. Conclusion

In the above sections I have discussed a unique translation problem faced while dealing with Alan Moore's inventive use of language in the comic series *The Courtyard* and *Neonomicon* at significant length. This translation problem reaches a critical point in a panel in *Neonomicon,* which disconcertingly foreshadows the end of the entire series while simultaneously providing the reader with an important but largely unintelligible key to reading the story as a whole: this key is explicitly described by one of the protagonists as being instrumental in allowing her to "understand everything". The markedness of the passage in question and the in-story meta-comment it originates were interpreted as in-text evidence that this was an essential aspect to be preserved in translation. As a result, finding a creative way of retaining these aspects in Brazilian Portuguese was treated as a significant part of the whole point of the text.

Nevertheless, in view of the level of detail to which a single passage of the comics series is subjected, one might reasonably ask whether such an undertaking can be expected to be carried out under real-world conditions by a professional translator. This is a question which, as the translator responsible for producing the translation discussed herein, I feel sufficiently qualified to answer in the affirmative. There seems to be no plausible reason to doubt the aesthetic and literary aspirations of Moore's textual experimentation, which very closely match Mary Snell-Hornby's (1995, p. 51) definition of literary language:

> Literary – and in particular poetic – language is concerned with the *exploitation of the entire capacity of a language system* (…) and involves – not merely deviance from a static and prescriptive norm – but the *creative extension* of the language norm.

This sort of creative extension found in literary texts can also be described as a potentially enhanced meaning whose rewards to the reader are commensurate with the cognitive effort put into the act of reading:

> This is then the test of a literary text, the existence of a potentially enhanced meaning, whereby more cognitive effect can be obtained in return for more cognitive effort (…) According to Gotti (2005, pp. 146-148) the potential to reveal more is the only key difference between literary and purely technical writing. (Katan, 2015, p. 12)

In these cases, the translator is tasked not only with making the necessary cognitive effort in order to get at the text's potentially enhanced meaning, as a dedicated reader would,

but also with finding a suitably creative treatment to be adopted in the target-language – as a dedicated creator would. In cases such as this, translating with no recourse to creative extensions and enhanced meanings would produce no more than a "purely technical" target-language rendition from a source whose entire point revolves around the use of literary devices and literary explorations of language.

This approach to creative translation practice has of course nothing to do with adaptation of the source material: rather, it is the very definition of literary translation taken to its logical (if at times extreme) conclusion. When even the process of using context-bound, unrepeatable and non-deducible translations in non-literary contexts has already been properly described as a legitimate and duly categorized translation technique,[13] there would seem to be little point in challenging its suitability in the context of literary translation, where creative approaches and active translator intervention (in a neutral sense) are the norm. With regard to these limit-cases, David Katan (2015, p. 25) argues:

> This is neither foreignisation nor domestication but transcreation, whereby the translator intervenes to create something clearly based on the original, but not directly inferable from the original text. Crucially, transcreation is capable of counteracting the universal features of translation, which flatten and standardise the reading, and hence reduce the possibility of (re)producing lasting artistic merit.

In a pragmatic statement to similar effect, Hofstadter claims that "every translator has to take risks, and has to attempt reconstructions of some things at times" (Hofstadter, p. 200). My intention with this article was – to the extent that it might be a feasible enterprise – to offer a glimpse into the inner workings of the mechanism by looking beneath the veil of speech.

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[13] Molina and Albir call this technique "discursive creation" as define it as "an operation in the cognitive process of translating by which a non-lexical equivalence is established that only works in context" while simultaneously being "totally unpredictable out of context". See Molina and Albir, pp. 505 and 510.

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