

TRADITIONAL VERSIFICATION AND MODERNISM: TRANSLATING GUILHERME DE ALMEIDA'S "SAVAGE" LYRICISM

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Uma grande obra de arte é sempre incompleta: tem a perfeição de não satisfazer, isto é, de não cansar nunca.

GUILHERME DE ALMEIDA

Introduction

This article is the fruit of my study of a poet who in his lifetime was elected 'the prince of Brazilian poets' and who profoundly influenced the course of Brazilian twentieth-century poetry, yet who is virtually unknown abroad. It is also a product of my frustration with the only translations of his work into English that I have been able to access (ten poems in Weissbort, 1994).

I chose to (re)translate Guilherme de Almeida's lyrical modernist poem "Epigraphe" for two reasons. The first is that it is the opening poem in his first book of modernist inspired poetry, *A frauta que eu perdi — canções gregas*, which was a point of departure for a significant period of experimentation and development in his work. The second reason is because I found the existing translation so frustratingly unsatisfactory. While it is possible to argue that as there is so little Brazilian poetry in translation at all it is hard to justify retranslation of one of the few texts already available, I also feel it is important to redress the literary balance.

I will give a broad overview of de Almeida's poetic, historical and literary context before analysing the poem under discussion. I will then also assess personal strategies taken for my translation as well as comment on the earlier translation.

To define what is good poetry in translation is as difficult a task as establishing a theory that provides rules on how to do it. However, to have the latter, one must have the former; it may be easier to suggest how *not* to translate poetry. It seems to be

generally accepted that the translation of poetry involves more difficulties than other literary forms; so what is poetry and what do readers expect from it in translation?

Poetry & Translation

Whereas prose tends to define and enclose, to follow from one step to another, poetry suggests and selects; it is more unpredictable, imagistic and symbolic. In poetry there should be no redundancy, every word should be polysemic with meaning, musicality and connotational “aura”. It should reverberate beyond its superficial lexical communicative import through the poetic techniques that distinguish poetry from prose; a greater frequency of metaphor, connotational rather than denotational language, if not an explicit then at least an implicit metre and rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, pun and form. This is why “padding” (tautology and/or the addition of extra words in a translated text to satisfy the demands of rhyme or metre) is in general so frowned upon.

Baudelaire says that poetry is essentially analogy. The idea of universal correspondence comes from the idea that language is a micro-cosmos, a double of the universe. Between the language of the universe and the universe of language, there is a bridge, a link: poetry. The poet, says Baudelaire, is the translator. The universal translator and the translator of the universe. (Hönig, 1985:157)

Just as translations are woven from earlier texts, so frequently are the source texts themselves. This concept of a poet being the first translator of his own poetry is also mentioned by Novalis in a 1797 letter to Schlegel in which he wrote “In the end all poetry is translation” (quoted in Robinson, 2002: 212). Poe’s concept of “The rhythmical creation of beauty” (1850), and Benjamin’s “pure language” (1923), are attempts to define what we glimpse through the “translated” vehicles of poetry and music: the distilled essence of life.

There are those who strive not only for beauty but also the chimera of “poetic truth”. The Brazilian Parnassian poet Olavo Bilac, believed that “beleza e verdade são irmãs gêmeas” [beauty and truth are twin sisters], but this was something de Almeida himself disputed: “não há verdade, só há beleza” [there is no truth, there is only beauty]. De Almeida’s stance suggests multiple and interesting possibilities when taken into consideration by a translator as it has echoes of the 17th century French translations for which the phrase *les belles infidèles* was coined and poses the question as to whether a translated poem should be “faithful” or “beautiful”.

The translator's task is to restore the communication between poet and reader that, due to changes in language, time, place and tradition, has been lost, 'to make the source text [ST] available as a literary work of art in the target language [TL]' (Lefevere, 1975:42).

However, in the translation of poetry there will always be aspects (if not significant ones) that will be missing, as languages do not have the same phonology, syntactic structures, vocabulary, literary history, prosody or poetics. A poem that leans towards prose may present relatively few problems, but a poem that has a highly complex structure encompassing imagery, inter-textuality, idiom, ambiguity and complex tonalities will almost certainly have to sacrifice some elements in translation.

Holmes believed "[t]here is an extremely close relationship between the kind of verse form a translator chooses and the kind of total effect his translation achieves" (1988: 28). According to him, traditionally there have been four possible approaches to adopt for the translation of poetry into poetry. The first, the mimetic form, is "usually described as retaining the form of the original" (ibid: 25). It is associated with the conventional "ideal" of poetry translation, the transference of content together with form. Although it does not manage to be identical, it shares a fundamental similarity with the form of the ST, whether it is a fixed formal structure or the free verse that became so popular with the advent of Brazilian modernism.

Brazilian Modernism: An Overview

It is hard to arrive at a (single) working definition of Brazilian modernism, because although it was officially "launched" in 1922 with the *Semana de Arte Moderna* it was not a homogenous concept. Prior to this the principal poetic influences both in Brazil and in the work of Guilherme de Almeida had been the self-consciously intellectual Parnassian movement and the European influenced Symbolism; however, while Hispanic-American modernism was affiliated with the latter, *Brazilian* modernism was more aligned with the European avant-garde.

Its main characteristics were the search for modern, original and polemic means of communication, a multi-faceted, conspicuous and self-conscious nationalism, a return to the valorisation of Brazil's indigenous roots, an acceptance of the concurrent technical and urban revolution and an attempt to escape the procrustean use of the elevated language that had been so in vogue (cf. del Picchia, 1922: 231). It proposed an

approximation to language as it was spoken colloquially, a *Brazilian* language, not one in which traces of the earlier European hegemony still lingered.

One constant of the modernist movement was the juxtaposition of contradictory elements, Mario de Andrade's Parnassian poem about Malfatti's Expressionist painting "O homem amarelo", Valéry advocating a return to the discussion and debate with "formas puras ou cultas" (in Teles, 1976: 24), Graça Aranha rejecting "...tristeza [...] lirismo e [...] formalismo..." (ibid: 224) but in almost the same breath admiring Guilherme de Almeida's "lirismo [...] sutil e fresco" (ibid.).

For the purposes of this article, though, we can perhaps consider the basis of the modern spirit to be a combination of classical good sense, romanticism and literary exploration (Apollinaire, 1918: 149).

Guilherme de Almeida: The Man and his Work (1890-1969)

Como na expressão de um crítico, onde Mário e Oswald queriam ver tucanos e sabiás, Guilherme de Almeida continuava a ver rouxinóis.

CARLOS VOGT

Background and Influences

Guilherme de Almeida was born in 1890 to an educated middle-class family in Campinas, São Paulo. He graduated in law but worked as a journalist, film critic, essayist, translator and poet and though he was lauded in literary circles he kept the same job as a school secretary throughout most of his life.

He left twenty-seven volumes of poetry and six volumes of prose as well as numerous translations. His works can be divided loosely into three main phases; the first, his Parnassian-Symbolist phase showed strong neo-classical and romantic influences and comprised the books *Nós* (1917), *A dança das horas* (1919), *Messidor (Suave colheita)* (1919), *O livro de horas de Soror Dolorosa* (1920) and *Era uma vez* (1922). These were the precursors of his modernist phase, which began with *A fruta que eu perdi* (1924), and continued in 1925 with four separate publications; *Meu, Raça* (a rhapsody on Brazilian multi-racial ancestry) *Narciso* and *Encantamentos*. In 1929 he returned to his original preoccupation with form and versification with *Simplicidade*, which was followed by *Você* (1930), his haiku and other publications. As well writing

as his own poetry he also translated from French (Géraldy, Maeterlinck, Baudelaire and Verlaine, among others) and English (Kipling, Oscar Wilde and Tennessee Williams) and is still considered by many to have been one of the greatest poetry translators of Brazil. His later works exemplified his maturation as a poet; while still attending to versification, he communicated a more concentrated and condensed sense of self, with less of the (occasionally gauche) lyrical sentimentalism of his earlier poetry.

Guilherme de Almeida was extremely well read, versed in Latin and Greek, the classics, the French symbolists, and the works of Edgar Allan Poe (whose theories were instrumental in forming the symbolist movement in France and which eventually lead to the modernist movement), as well as the Portuguese and Brazilian writers of his time. This literary melange combined with his interest in heraldry, Medieval and Renaissance culture, and his total control over versification techniques meant that he was particularly qualified to “break” the rules and experiment with the new “no rules” of Brazilian modernism.

In his preface to *Magma* (Guimarães Rosa, 1997), de Almeida compliments Rosa on his free verse with a virtual absence of metre and rhyme. He calls the poetry in *Magma* “poesia autêntica”, and further defines it as “...correta sempre, sem um único abuso inútil, sem nenhuma dessas bobas, contraproducentes negociações da gramática, com que alguns ‘novos’ pretendem ser ... [novos]” (1997: 6-7). This rather sweeping generalization is slightly surprising coming from a poet who due to his reputation, experience and skill (with several published poetry collections under his belt), and contacts within the São Paulo government was perfect as the official voice for the new modernist group. However, he was too much of a non-conformist to limit himself to even such an innovative movement and while he toyed with modernist principles, he did not fall into the trap of modishness, prosaicism or overtly explicit nationalism and rather than assimilating his voice with the “alternative” mainstream he remained an individual. He continued to write poems of great lyric grace and managed to synthesize his earlier lyricism with more modernist elements; thus “modernism” became yet another string to his literary bow.

Style and Themes

From his Parnassian-influenced poetry through his modernist phase to his “mature” production, de Almeida’s poetry is melopoeic and colourful, full of sentiment and synaesthetic sensual stimuli. Most of his poetry is short and lyrical, created for

aesthetic appreciation rather than didactic purpose. It is not necessary to understand something in order to appreciate it, to consider it a thing of beauty; something can be incomprehensible but also attractive, and this means that strange collocations, unusual syntax, fragmentation and dislocation can be utilized in a poem while still maintaining the principles of attraction.

Much of modern poetry was dehumanised, it lost the lyrical first person “I”; but de Almeida maintains this even in his modernist phase. However this “I” is not solely autobiographical, it does not limit de Almeida to his empirical self, but rather represents his time and place, his position within society and his society itself. The recurrent circularity in his poetry can be considered as iconic; “iconic in that it reflects the never ending processes going on in the world” (Boase-Beier, 1994: 189), it reflects the idea of returning to the beginning and re-reading; the iconic circularity of life (and words themselves).

This circularity is linked not only to a poetic aesthetic but also to the circularity of the seasons, a recurrent theme throughout all his work. He uses all four seasons as allegories for love and life, but is particularly drawn to the crepuscular autumn, with its dead or dying leaves, signifying the passing of time, change and transitoriness.

He also plays with the dichotomy between sentiment and sensation, sentimentalism and passion, frivolity and seriousness, whimsy and gravity, superficial simplicity and syntactic complexity.

A characteristic of de Almeida is his ability to take different elements from his personal mental library and to juggle them in order to create something of his own, a sort of poetic collage unified by his mastery of versification. He liberally borrowed from his past and present; Iberian Medieval lyric forms (with their imperfect rhymes and assonances) and heraldic themes in *Suave colheita*, French and Brazilian Romanticism in *Nós* and *A dança das horas*, Brazil itself in *Raça*, mysticism and Catholicism in *O livro das horas*, the Classics in *A frauta que eu perdi* and *Narciso* (among others). This image of a ‘virtual’ library is particularly pertinent if one considers that after the end of the 1920s modernism itself became just one more element in his repertoire.

This flux of the new and the traditional is constantly present; the interweaving of contemporary and conservative elements throughout his works demands a reader’s (and translator’s) attention. I will describe the process of the translation of “Epigraphe” by discussing the value of the changes in the TT within the specific context of the poem itself.

The Poem

Strategies

One cannot expect to translate a poem out of context and for it to carry its secrets with it. My first step was to read de Almeida's main body of work in order to be able to recognise any intra-textual dialogue between lexis, titles and themes, semantic word chains (e.g. in *A frauta que eu perdi*; fauns, nymphs and shepherds, woods and groves, fountains, plane trees), and key words. I also read among his contemporaries to gauge inter-textual references, and perused some of the "metadiscourse"; the reviews, prefaces and critical commentaries; the "paratexts" (Genette, 1997: 1) that mediate between the text and the reader and that situate the work.

Overall, my translational aim was to give equal importance to the meaning and the musicality of the poem (particularly considering the theme). However, before tackling the translation of any poem it is necessary to analyse its themes, metre, rhymes and stylistic features. The latter encompass ambiguity (both lexical and syntactic), repetition (including alliteration, assonance, rhyme, repeated words / images / themes / syntactic features), literary context, key words, phrases, themes, syntactic features, and "iconicity" (language which mirrors what it refers to, for example onomatopoeias, omission points, sound repetition) (Boase-Beier, 1994:190). Before I began to craft the translated poem I wrote a literal trot, which immediately highlighted the problem of how to translate "frauta selvagem" (literally "savage/wild flute").

A Frauta que eu perdi - canções gregas

*Guilherme de Almeida [...] se evola da
longa e doce tristeza para nos dar nas
Canções Gregas a magia de uma poesia
mais livre do que a Arte.*

GRAÇA ARANHA

In de Almeida's first collection of "modernist" poetry there is a plurality that was not as obvious in his earlier work. While the poems are replete with classical imagery and his themes of exile, transcendence, nostalgia and heroism continue to some extent to be the same as before, they are simultaneously modernist as they mark a break from strict form with the adoption of free verse, new ways in rhyme, and a more direct poetic voice.

A frauta que eu perdi - canções gregas is a collection of thirty-four classically inspired polymetric short lyrical poems that mark de Almeida's affinity with the modernist movement while maintaining his human lyrical voice. They form a bridge between the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, that is in keeping with his technique of presenting past references as exhibits from his personal literary library.

"Epigraphe" / "Epigraph"

For the purposes of this translation I have used two different copies of "Epigraphe" taken from the first edition of *A frauta que eu perdi* (1924, Anuário do Brasil) and from the 1993/2001 anthologised edition of de Almeida's poems (selected by Carlos Vogt). Of the two, my personal preference is for the former as it not only communicates some of the historical divide between poet and reader through its old-fashioned spelling (which has been modernised in the latter publication), but also appeals aesthetically through its graphic presentation.

An epigraph is an inscription, quotation or motto placed at the start of a book to indicate its name or purpose. This is doubly significant, as "Epigraphe" is the initial poem in de Almeida's first book of modernist poetry. An allegorical poem of condensed lyrical narrative, not only is it the epigraph to *A frauta que eu perdi*, but also to de Almeida's take on Brazilian modernism.

Themes and Intertextuality

A translator should be careful not to over explicate themes in the translated poem, as this would not only defeat the source text poet's objective, but would also deprive readers of the opportunity of arriving at their own conclusions. However, it is necessary to consider carefully what the main themes of the poem are before beginning to translate. While metonymic with ancient myths of Pan and creation, "Epigraphe" also functions on another level. Just as the modernists associated themselves with de Almeida in 1922, in "Epigraphe", his "frauta selvagem" plays its own tune and calls nature to it. As opposed to the Parnassians who believed in bringing the classics to Brazilian literature, de Almeida seems to advocate taking Brazilian literature to the classics. This inversion of expectations implies that his "frauta" will tame and infiltrate the Greek (literary) landscape rather than the contrary, and creates a culturally reversed pantheistic invocation which can be read as a metaphor for an attempt to (re)build a *Brazilian* literature.

Metre

It is vital to have an understanding of the versification of the source language in order to be able to evaluate and thus translate it. While English versification tends to be measured in feet (of most commonly two or three syllables), the prosody of most Brazilian poetry is syllabic.

The Brazilian modernists embraced the concept of free verse; meaning that the poetic lines are not composed to fit any one pattern of mechanical scansion and do not adhere to any one form. Free verse can be a selection of metres, or syllables or stressed syllables, and include (ir)regular rhymes and rhyme schemes as well as other poetic techniques. It is one thing to translate traditional poetic forms into the same form, and another to translate contemporary poets who work without fixed prosody, however it is yet another to translate a poet such as de Almeida, who had embraced traditional forms until *Era uma vez* in 1922, but who then threw off such restrictions with *A frauta que eu perdi*. Although he was embarking on a new poetic voyage he did not discard his knowledge of versification, and this is important for a translator to remember.

As free verse, “Epigraphe” is beautifully constructed, crafted and polished; it has a rhythmical balance and symmetry that quite possibly demands greater poetic skill than more traditional strict forms. The poem is composed of fifteen lines divided into two parts; the first of two lines, the second of thirteen. As can be seen in table i), although the syllabic metre varies from line to line, the lines are frequently composed of three-syllable feet (dactyls, anapaests and amphibrachs) which have a musical effect of slowing the pace and contributing to the sense of mystery in the poem.

A comparison of tables i) and ii) shows that the syllabic count of the target text tends to be slightly less than that of the source text, while the foot count is in general slightly greater. I have tried where possible in the target text to keep the three-syllable movement of the source text, however overall there are far more two-syllable feet (iambs and trochees) than in the source text, meaning that some of the dreamy musicality has been lost.

I have attempted to avoid padding as there is even less excuse for it in a free form poem of this type than in, for example a sonnet with greater metrical exigencies. I have, though, made some lexical additions for other reasons, adding for example “sylvan” to “savage” (line 1) in order to slightly soften the latter, “flashing” in line 4 for

its alliteration with “fish” (and images of silvery glints), and “sounds” in line 13 for its internal rhyme with “round” (line 11).

Table i): Source text metre¹ and rhyme scheme

	Syllable Count	Feet Count and Type	End- Rhyme Scheme	End-Rhyme Type
Line 1	9	3 feet (3 anapaests)	a	Half Rhyme 'selvagem'/'margem'
Line 2	10	4 feet (4 dactyls)	b	Half Rhyme 'vidro'/'brunido'
Line 3	7	3 feet (3 dactyls [last truncated])	a	
Line 4	10	4 feet (4 dactyls [last truncated])	b	
Line 5	10	4 feet (1 anapaest, 2 iambs, 1 anapaest)	c	Vowel Rhyme 'aguas'/'altas'/'algas'
Line 6	8	3 feet (3 amphibrachs)	c	
Line 7	15	6 feet (2 trochees, 1 anapaest, 2 iambs, 1 4 th paeon)	d	Vowel Rhyme 'nymphas'/'limpas'
Line 8	1	1 foot (1 trochee)	c	
Line 9	5	3 feet (3 trochees)	d	
Line10	3	1 foot (1 anapaest)	e	Perfect 'encontrardes'/'tardes'
Line11	12	5 feet (1 amphibrach, 1 anapaest, 2 trochees, 1 iamb)	e	Internal consonant rhyme 'todas as tardes'
Line12	12	4 feet (4 anapaests)	f	Perfect 'segredos'/'dedos'
Line13	10	3 feet (1 iamb, 2 4 th paeons) ²	f	
Line14	8	3 feet (1 amphibrach, 1 anapaest, 1 iamb)	g	Perfect 'entre'/'ventre'
Line15	10	3 feet (2 anapaests, 1 4 th paeon) ³	6	

¹ The conventional method of syllable counting in Portuguese is the *padrão agudo* which (like the French) counts only up to the last stressed syllable.

² Regular *decassílabo heróico* stressed on 2-6-10.

Table ii): Target text metre and rhyme scheme

	Syllable Count	Feet Count and Type	End- Rhyme Scheme	Rhyme Type
Line 1	9	4 feet (1 anapaest, 3 iambs)	a	Vowel rhyme 'flute'/'pool' & Internal rhyme 'savage'/'verge' (line 3)
Line 2	9	5 feet (4 iambs, 1 monosyllabic foot)	a	Internal rhyme 'glass'/'brass' (line 4)
Line 3	8	4 feet (2 trochees, 2 iambs)	b	Vowel rhyme 'verge'/'pearl'
Line 4	9	5 feet (4 trochees, 1 monosyllabic foot)	b	Consonant rhyme 'pearl'/'pool'
Line 5	9	4 feet (1 iamb, 1 anapaest, 2 iambs)	c	Vowel rhyme 'streams'/'trees'
Line 6	9	4 iambs		
Line 7	11	5 feet (2 trochees, 1 dactyl, 1 spondee, 1 trochee)	a/b	Consonant rhyme 'pool'/'pearl'/'footfall'
Line 8	2	1 trochee	d	Repetition 'algae'/'algae'
Line 9	6	3 trochees	d	Internal rhyme 'liquid'/'limpid'
Line10	4	2 iambs	d	Stressed-Unstressed Rhyme 'algae'/'see'
Line11	8	4 feet (1 iamb, 1 anapaest, 1 trochee, 1 monosyllabic foot)	e	Internal rhyme 'round'/'sound (line13)
Line12	12	5 feet (2 trochees, 1 iamb, 1 amphibrach, 1 dactyl)	f	Unaccented rhyme 'sonorous'/'hollowness'
Line13	9	4 feet (1 trochee, 2 dactyls, 1 monosyllabic foot)	(e) g	Perfect rhyme 'tongue'/'among'
Line14	6	2 feet (2 anapaests)	g	

³ A traditional Brazilian *martelo-agalopado*.

Line 15 11 4 feet (1 amphibrach, 1 f
dactyl, 1 trochee, 1
dactyl)

Rhyme

Rhyme creates a complex network of sound and is most importantly a musical device; it gives pleasure aurally as music does. It also serves to bind a poem as well as giving intellectual pleasure that can be shared by both the poet and the reader.

Although the rhyme scheme would appear to form three verses of four (a/b/a/b), five (c/c/d/c/d) and six (e/e/f/f/g/g) lines; the separation of the first two lines from the rest of the poem would suggest a bi-partite structure. In fact though, the poem is tri-partite as the initial pair of lines serve to set the scene for the poem, the following seven lines describe and invoke the elements in and around the lake, and the final six offer a poetic resolution.

“Epigraphe” has a tight rhyme scheme with seven end rhymes over its fifteen lines. As shown in table i) the rhymes are not all “perfect”, de Almeida was an expert on the style of the medieval troubadours and he used many of their near-rhyme techniques: vowel rhyme, half rhyme, consonance and assonance, all of which give the musical effect of the lines modulating from one key to another.

Although de Almeida’s use of near-rhyme intensifies in *Narciso* (published the following year), it is in *A frauta que eu perdi* that he starts to exploit it. I have managed to maintain the seven end-rhyme scheme in the translation through the employment of additional near-rhyme devices such as unaccented rhyme (where the rhyme falls on the unaccented end of a feminine rhyme word) and consonant end rhyme, both used by the North American poetess Emily Dickinson, an early precursor of the modernists.

Sound

“Epigraphe” is resonant with the alliteration of /s/, /z/, and /ʒ/ sounds, creating a musical and seductive sibilance. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines sibilance as “a hissing or whistling sound”; this makes it an iconic part of this musically themed poem and one that therefore needs to be transferred. The onomatopoeic sibilant alliteration increases throughout the poem (the incidence of /s/ alliteration for lines 1–15 respectively is 1/3/2/1/3/4/6/1/3/2/3/7/8/3/7) with its climax in lines 12–13) and where possible I have maintained this sibilance in the target text (cf. table iii). Although the

near chiasmus of “lindas algas limpas” (line 9) has unfortunately been lost, I managed to retain some of its intoxicating liquid alliterated assonance with “liquid limpid” thus contributing to the melopoeia of the line.

Although unobtrusive in the first four lines of the source text, the assonance of /a/ becomes stronger from line 5 and follows through the spaced assonantal chain of “folhas mortas que acordaes ao passo alípede das nymphas” (line 7) through to line 11. Unfortunately much of this assonance has been lost in the target text but I hope that I have managed to compensate somewhat through alliteration and internal rhyme (cf. tables i-iii).

Enjambment, Punctuation and Caesurae

Pauses, caesurae and differing line lengths serve to define as silences the empty spaces around the poem. “Epigraphe” is composed of three sentences, the first introductory, the second invocatory, and the third providing the resolution. Keeping the enjambment in the same places is probably an important feature in order to keep the foregrounding of certain words (particularly the elements that are invoked) and the poem’s fluency. The caesural pauses are also important as they punctuate and pace the poetic invocation. The commas around the climactic invocation “vinde” (line 11) create a significant caesura and this has been carried over to the TT and emphasised by the two consecutive stressed syllables ‘lost’ and ‘gather’ that are separated by a comma. This sentence then terminates in the middle of the following line with an exclamation mark that separates it from the more intimate, secretive and enticing final sentence.

Table iii): Assonance and alliteration in ST and TT

	Portuguese (ST)		English (TT)	
	<i>Assonance</i>	<i>Alliteration</i>	<i>Assonance</i>	<i>Alliteration</i>
Line 1				/s/v/ ‘savage sylvan’
Line 2		/k/s/ ‘canniços’		
Line 3		/c/s/ ‘Juncos inquietos’		/r/s/ ‘Restless rushes’
Line 4		/p/s/ ‘peixes de prata’		/f/ʃ/ ‘flashing fish’

		/b/r/ 'cobre brunido '		/b/ʒ/s/ 'burnished brass '
Line 5	/a/ 'das aguas '	/v/ 'viveis na vida movel '		/s/ 'stirring sparkling streams '
Line 6	/a/ 'cigarras das arvores altas '	/s/ 'das arvores altas '		/t/ 'towering trees '
Line 7	/a/ 'folhas mortas que acordaes ao passo alípede das nymphas '	/s/ 'folhas mortas que acordaes ao passo alípede das nymphas '	/i/ 'nymphs' winged '	/l/s/ 'lifeless leaves ' /w/ 'wake [...] winged ' /f/ 'nymphs' [...] footfall '
Line 8				
Line 9	/i/a/ 'lindas algas limpas '	/l/s/ 'lindas algas limpas '	/i/ 'liquid limpid '	/l/d/ 'liquid limpid algae '
Line10		/s/ 'se encontrades' (symmetry)		
Line11	/a/ 'todas as tardes '	/t/d/s/ 'todas as tardes '		
Line12		/s/ 'ouvireis os segredos / sonoros '		/v/ 'every evening ' /s/ 'sonorous /
Line13		/s/ 'os meus lábios e os meus dedos '		/s/ 'secret sound '
Line14	/e/ 'esquecidos entre '			/l/ 'left to linger '
Line15		/s/ 'os silêncios ariscos do seu '	/i/ 'skittish silences of its '	/s/ʒ/ 'skittish silences of its hollowness '

Deixis, Lexis and Syntax

I am fortunate translating into English to have at my disposal its multiple etymology of Latin, Anglo-Saxon and other linguistic influences. My preference was for words derived from Romance languages (in order to shift the target text closer to the Portuguese and impart a more literary flavour), but when challenged by metre, rhyme or melopoeia I was able to resort to Anglo-Saxon or other alternatives.

This advantage is counteracted by the fact that whereas in English the noun follows the adjective, in Portuguese the adjective is usually postponed. This allows the rhyming source text poet to choose from a (frequently) wide range of descriptive adjectives for end-rhymes, and in general means that there are far more options for rhymes than if one is limited to a noun end-rhyme as in English.

“Epigraphe” has few place references, other than the metaphorical “lago de vidro” (which interestingly points forward towards de Almeida’s *Narciso*), a mythical landscape of water, woods, reeds and grasses, removed from any real place and imbued with a certain timeless magical mysticism. Because the markers of lake and woods refer back to ancient myth known to educated readers of both cultures there is little cultural distortion (superficially) from Portuguese to English.

The initial problem was how to translate “frauta” (an archaic form of “flauta”). To translate it as “pan-pipes” would overstate the ancient Greek reference as well as having unwanted connotations of pseudo-Peruvian piped (excuse the pun) music in supermarkets and shopping centres the world over. Another possible translational option was “pipe” or “pipes” but this also was unsatisfactory due to its associations with smoking and/or plumbing! I eventually settled for the etymological equivalent “flute”, which despite having associations nowadays with more classical music, I consider to be the least disruptive option. This was then teamed with “savage sylvan” to lend the image power as well as primitivism, and in addition contribute to the sibilance of the poem as a whole.

I have taken the liberty with “folhas mortas” (line7) to translate it as “lifeless leaves” instead of the more literal “dead leaves”. While not being inappropriate in the context of this one poem (for the alliteration of /l/ and /s/), it is perhaps questionable in the context of de Almeida’s body of work as “folhas mortas” are a part of his repeated poetic imagery and vocabulary (in *Suave colheita*, *A dança das horas*, *O livro das horas de Soror Dolorosa* and *Rosamor* among others).

The imperative “vinde” (line 11) exhorts nature for action while the foregrounding of “debruçar” in the following line adds to the strength of the exhortation and provides compressed energy. The syntactical ambiguity of “debruçar-vos” means it can refer not only to the fish, the cicadas, the leaves and the algae of the poem, but also to the poem’s readers. The 2nd person plural pronoun does not exist in English, so I found “gather round” (line 11) felicitous as it holds within it connotations of both “vinde!” (“come!”), and the plural form of “you”.

“Alípede” (line 7) is an erudite word not in common use in either language. I could have translated it as its etymological equivalent “aliped”, however I felt due to its obscurity its pronunciation in English would be unclear. I therefore chose the substitute “winged”, which in addition has an alliterative and assonantal connection with “wake” and “nymphs”. Another element that I considered important to maintain in the target text was the first word of the second line, “entre” (“among”), which is repeated at the end of the penultimate line, and reminds the reader of the circularity of which de Almeida was so fond.

Evaluation of the translations

The extent to which the target text represents the original is paradoxical if it is accepted that poetry in translation can only really be judged by similarly bilingual readers who have no need for translation in the first place. Evaluation cannot only be based on equivalence (dynamic or otherwise) but on consistent translational aims that avoid concentrating on one aspect to the exclusion of all others. Gauging equivalence of form is easier than of content, but it is possible to get wrapped up in the specificity of sounds and forms to such an extent that the content is neglected (cf. Ray 1976). On the other hand the translations of a poet/translator like Robert Bly (Bly, 1983) show that a purely content-focussed text, which ignores form, can produce very wooden and prosaic results.

“Epigraphe” was first translated into English with another nine translations of de Almeida’s poems (taken from the collection *Os melhores poemas de Guilherme de Almeida* chosen by Carlos Vogt) by the freelance translator David Coles and published in the journal *Modern Poetry in Translation* (Weissbort, 1994). I found little in Cole’s translation to praise as it gives the impression of a stilted literal trot more than a poetic (re)creation. There seems to be little or no attempt at reproducing any poetic device and this, taken together with the fact that the choice of poems appears to be arbitrary and the fact that they are not presented in any coherent order, leads me to believe that the translations were probably prepared in haste. This suspicion is heightened by the glaring error in his translation of another poem, “Felicidade” (originally from *Suave colheita*, 1919). Coles was presumably unable to look at editions other than the cited anthology, as “Felicidade” in the latter has an unfortunate misprint in the last line of the first verse.

Instead of “E eu respondi: ‘Bom dia, *folha* morta!’”⁴ (remember that “*folhas mortas*” are recurrent in de Almeida’s work), we are given “E eu respondi: ‘Bom dia, *filha* morta!’”⁵. This has been translated (rather tragically) as “My daughter, good day, who died long before.”

I do not wish to be overly harsh on the translations of another, as the context of my own translation has been a privileged one. Unhampered by editorial constraints I was able to focus deeply on the translation of one solitary short lyrical poem, to take the time to study the author and consider socio-historical context and inter (and intra) textual references. This context is very different from that of a harried professional translator receiving a commission for the translation of x number of unknown poems to be translated within an unrealistic deadline. Nevertheless, it is a shame that with only a smattering of Brazilian poetry available in translation into English these translations should be so unconsidered. On their basis it is unlikely that any Anglophone reader will desire to pursue the poetry of Guilherme de Almeida further.

The evaluation of one’s own translation is difficult and runs the risk of being anecdotal and subjective. A translation cannot be the original, there will always be tension between the autonomy of the former and the authority of the latter, but it can produce “a text which is a translation of the original poem and at the same time a poem in its own right within the target language” (Holmes 1988: 50) and be *satisfactorily* analogous.

Whether I have successfully transported the lyricism and content of the source text into the target text is of course arguable, but despite the metrical changes, minor lexical alterations and loss of some of the assonance, I feel that I have been able to compensate in other areas and that I have managed to maintain the style, musicality and lyrical message of the poem, and thus salvage a little of de Almeida’s poetic reputation in English. In spite of de Almeida’s qualms about mixing truth with beauty my intentions have not been to merely (re)create a true image of the source text but to also create a poem that has beauty in its own right. However, as beauty is in the eye of the beholder this is something that readers must decide for themselves...

⁴ Literally: ‘And I answered: “Good day, dead leaf!”’

⁵ Literally: ‘And I answered: “Good day, dead daughter!”’

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“EPIGRAPHE”

Eu perdi minha frauta selvagem
entre os canniços do lago de vidro.

Juncos inquietos da margem;
peixes de prata e de cobre brunido
que viveis na vida movel das aguas;
cigarras das arvores altas;
folhas mortas que acordaes ao passo alípede das nymphas;
algas,
lindas algas limpas:
- se encontrardes
a frauta que eu perdi, vinde, todas as tardes,
debruçar-vos sobre ella! E ouvireis os segredos
sonoros, que os meus labios e os meus dedos
deixaram esquecidos entre
os silencios ariscos do seu ventre.

EPIGRAPH (Translation Juliet Attwater)

I have lost my savage sylvan flute
among the reeds around the glass pool.

Restless rushes along the verge;
flashing fish of burnished brass and pearl
that live in the stirring sparkling streams;
cicadas in the towering trees;
lifeless leaves that wake at the nymphs' winged footfall;
algae,
liquid limpid algae:
if you should see
the flute I have lost, gather round
every evening! And you will hear the sonorous
secret sound that my fingers and tongue
left to linger among
the skittish silences of its hollowness.

“EPIGRAPH” (Translation David Coles)

I have lost my savage flute
among the reeds of the glassy lake.

Restless rushes of the shore;
burnished coppery and silver fish

who live in the water's stirring life;
crickets in the tall trees;
dead leaves whom the nymphs' wing-footed passing awakens;
algae,
clean beautiful algae:
- should you find the flute I have lost
come, with each dusk,
and stoop to examine it! You shall hear
its deep-toned secrets, forgotten by my lips and fingers
among the shy and sandy silences
of its belly.