

Lauro Maia Amorim

Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de
Mesquita Filho - IBILCE/Unesp
lauromar@ibilce.unesp.br

THE ROLE OF THE (IN)VISIBLE AND THE SECRET IN THE TRANSLATION OF HARRYETTE MULLEN'S MUSE & DRUDGE

***O papel do (In)visível e do segredo na tradução de
Muse & Drudge, de Harryette Mullen***

RESUMO

Este artigo, fundamentado nas reflexões de Jacques Derrida em *Des Tours de Babel*, aborda a questão do (in)visível na tradução, argumentando que, para além da noção tradicional de comunicação, a tradução produz um espaço complexo de relações entre o visível e o invisível, realçando os valores do não dito e do segredo que se efetivam na sua relação com a interpretação. Essa linha de pensamento perpassa a discussão da tradução, por mim realizada, de dois poemas da obra *Muse & Drudge* (1995), da autora afro-americana Harryette Mullen, cuja densa poesia manifesta possibilidades (in)esperadas de sentidos e de associações, que se proliferam na tradução. Argumenta-se que cada ato tradu-tório acarreta uma relação entre aquilo que é traduzido (e tornado visível ou inteligível através desse ato) e aquilo que permanece invisível e secreto, resistindo a uma tradução definitiva, o que, como tal, requer novas interpretações em busca de inteligibilidade (ou "visibilidade"). Analisa-se em que medida essa relação entre o visível e o invisível participa da tradução da noção de blackness que os poemas de Mullen suscitam e de que modo a sua poesia traduzida dialoga com questões de recepção na cultura brasileira.

Palavras-Chave: tradução; (in)visibilidade; negritude; poesia; Harryette Mullen.

ABSTRACT

This paper, based on Jacques Derrida's thoughts in *Des Tours of Babel*, addresses the issue regarding the (in)visible in translation, by arguing that the latter, beyond the traditional conception of communication, produces a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, which highlights the values of the *non-dit* and the secret that take place in their relation to interpretation. This line of thought underpins the discussion of my translation of two poems from *Muse & Drudge* (1995), by the African-American poet Harryette Mullen, whose dense poetry displays un(expected) possibilities of meanings and associations that proliferate in translation. It is argued that every act of translation entails a relationship between that which is translated (and made visible or intelligible through this act) and that which remains invisible and secret by resisting a definitive translation, which, as such, requires further interpretations in search for intelligibility (or "visibility"). We analyze the extent to which such relation between the visible and the invisible takes part in the translation of the notion of blackness raised by Mullen's poems and how her translated poetry dialogues with issues of reception in Brazilian culture.

Keywords: translation; (in)visibility; blackness; poetry; Harryette Mullen.

Anhanguera Educacional Ltda.

Correspondência/Contato
Alameda Maria Tereza, 4266
Valinhos, São Paulo
CEP 13.278-181
rc.ipade@aesapar.com

Coordenação
Instituto de Pesquisas Aplicadas e
Desenvolvimento Educacional - IPADE

Artigo Original
Recebido em: 18/01/2012
Avaliado em: 21/03/2012

Publicação: 30 de março de 2012

1. INTRODUCTION: TRANSLATION AND REFLECTIONS ON A "PANE OF GLASS"

I see translation as the attempt to produce a text so transparent that it does not seem to be translated. A good translation is like a pane of glass. You only notice that it's there when there are little imperfections — scratches, bubbles. Ideally, there shouldn't be any. It should never call attention to itself.
Norman Shapiro (qtd. in Venuti 1995, p. 1)

One of the forms in which invisibility might be related to translation is through the assumption that translators should be, or are expected to be, transparent in their practice, just like a "pane of glass"; that is, they should never call attention to their work or to themselves. Translators have traditionally been poorly remunerated worldwide, and translation has been, for more than 2000 years, an underrated activity. However, the constitutive role played by (a number of known and unknown) translators on the construction of what we have come to name as "human civilization," would be sufficient to recognize that translation, in fact, is nothing less than a visibly *transformative* activity.

Even the notion of identity traditionally presupposes a conception of translation that, more often than not, relies on the possibility that the process of "identification," of translating the other, should itself be transparent. When associated, for example, with a particular social group, national or "racial" identity (such as "blackness," "Latinos," "American" or "African-American"), identity is generally thought to *invisibly translate* the visibility of the alleged essence or the inherent truth of those groups or nations. Within this framework, any approach to identity is grounded on the assumption — underscored by an idealized conception of responsibility and decision-making — that neutrality and objectivity in translating or in dealing with the other are not only possible, but are also necessary and urgent ethical requirements. Neutrality and objectivity are, thus, equated with some form of *invisibility* of the self: translations are traditionally expected to be objectively *invisible* so that the original text may communicate itself, its identity, in another language and culture, without distortions, guaranteeing the absolute visibility of *the original text*. This view is exemplified by Norman Shapiro's comments on translation in the above epigraph.¹

¹ Lawrence Venuti, in his book *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995), reminds us that translation is generally expected to be fluent enough to be read as if it were the original text. In Venuti's arguments, it is this fluency that produces the translator's invisibility, since translation should not display any signs of opacity, offering instead only easy intelligibility. Venuti claims that this discourse of fluency presents the translated text as if it were the original text, when it is, in fact, a text that domesticates the foreign condition of the latter so as to adhere to mainstream expectations for fluency. The author advocates a foreignizing translation, rather than a domesticating translation, as a *form of resistance* in which the translator may resort to domestic non-mainstream linguistic and cultural forms with which he or she will be able to reconstruct the "foreignness" of the original text. As a form of resistance, a foreignizing translation may disrupt fluency expectations and introduce new possibilities of reading and writing in the domestic culture. More importantly, Venuti points out the importance of reading a translation *as translation*, since this means "reflecting on its conditions, the domestic dialects and discourses in which it is written and the domestic cultural situation in which it is read." (p. 312).

Even if we consider the supposed objectivity and transparency of a “pane of glass,” whatever is exhibited through it is transformed precisely by the belief in the transparency it allegedly conveys: the pane of glass (as in a shop window) confers a particular value on whatever is framed within its decorated boundaries, within the frame of the expectations it brings out. And the pane of glass calls for the viewer from the outside of a shop. The glass itself interferes with the viewer as much as with that which is viewed, and not only physically – the ways in which the light falls on it, for example – but psychologically as well.

The notion of a “pane of glass” engenders a complex arrangement of perceptions that foregrounds identity within the urban space. The would-be customers can see themselves looking at a shop window, they can see their own faces, their clothes, and envision what they interpret/translate about themselves in the reflection: belonging or not fully belonging to a capitalist society, they may feel desire or sheer curiosity, frustration or admiration, happiness or simply eagerness for power. What is the distance between their desire and the object of their (ever-frustrated) desire/necessity? What exists between them? How socially or economically visible or invisible do the customers perceive themselves to be in a “pane of glass”? Despite its supposedly “absolute transparency,” the shop window certainly plays an (in)visible role of triggering a seemingly innocuous, social mirroring process.

The shop window can remind us of the limits of “property,” of the distance between those who own and those who do not: one might not notice that the “pane of glass” is over there. One might or might not be aware of the social/psychological role that it quite effectively plays in its (in)visibility.

It is possible to think beyond the common, traditionally accepted meanings of visibility and invisibility, in order to instead reflect on the complex simultaneous relationship between the visible and the invisible at play in translation. In addition, the notion of resistance to translation represents another possibility for understanding the relationship between simultaneous visibility and invisibility in the process of translation itself. This line of thought has informed my translations of some poems by the African-American poet and scholar Harryette Mullen, whose work will be addressed further on in this article. Said reasoning has been based on Derrida’s considerations on translation in *Des Tours de Babel* (1985). In the following section, I will examine some aspects of this text and its contribution towards understanding translation as transformation, especially the relationship between visibility and invisibility in translation itself.

2. TRANSLATION BEYOND COMMUNICATION: THE (IN)VISIBLE AND THE SECRET

In his essay *Des Tours de Babel*, Jacques Derrida discusses both the biblical myth of Babel and the essay "The Task of the Translator" by Walter Benjamin. Derrida demonstrates why translation is both a necessary and an impossible task, or simply put, a double bind. In the biblical myth of Babel, God imposed his own name upon the Shems, who had started to construct a tower through which they would impose their own language to the world, as a universal, transparent language. By imposing his name upon the Shems, God interrupts the construction of the tower, and they are condemned to the multiplicity of tongues. As Derrida points out

The "tower of Babel" does not merely figure the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, system, and architectonics. What the multiplicity of idioms comes to limit is not only a "true" translation, a transparent and adequate interexpression, it is also a structural order, a coherence of construct. There is then (let us translate) something like an internal limit to formalization, an incompleteness of the constructure. (2007, p. 191).

The Shems need to translate in order to overcome the differences between languages, but their translation is interrupted since it is not pure equivalence or a transparent intercommunication. God's name, Babel, is both a proper name and a common name meaning "confusion." As with every proper name, Babel resists translation; it is untranslatable, but, at the same time, it is "confusedly" a common name, "confusion," which is to say it lends itself to translation. As Derrida (1988) clarifies, God simultaneously asks for translation and interrupts it:

To translate Babel by "confusion" is already to give a confused and uncertain translation. It translates a proper name into a common noun. Thus one sees that God declares war by forcing men, if you will, to translate his proper name with a common noun. In effect, he says to them: Now you will not impose a single tongue; you will be condemned to the multiplicity of tongues; translate and, to begin with, translate my name. Translate my name, says he, but at the same time he says: You will not be able to translate my name, because, first of all, it's a proper name and, secondly, my name, the one I myself have chosen for this tower, signifies ambiguity, confusion, et cetera. Thus God, in his rivalry with the tribe of the Shems, gives them, in a certain way, an absolutely double command. He imposes a double bind on them when he says: Translate me and what is more don't translate me. I desire that you translate me, that you translate the name I impose on you; and at the same time, whatever you do, don't translate it, you will not be able to translate it. (p. 102).

The proper name effect is a result of the untranslatability of the idiom, of the secret in every text (in every language), of that which remains invisible but that, paradoxically, demands its own translation by getting entangled in the very linguistic system that makes reading, translation, legibility and visibility possible. Derrida (1988) elaborates on the proper name effect:

I would say that this desire is at work in every proper name: translate me, don't translate me. On the one hand, don't translate me, that is, respect me as a proper name, respect my law of the proper name which stands over and above all languages. And, on the other hand, translate me, that is, understand me, preserve me within the universal

language, follow my law, and so on. This means that the division of the proper name, insofar as it is the division of God – in a word, insofar as it divides God himself – in some way provides the paradigm for this work of the proper name. God himself is in the double bind, God as the deconstructor of the Tower of Babel. (p. 102).

Translation is necessary, but it is ultimately impossible (as transparency, as pure equivalence), which means that translation can only exist as a regulated transformation², rather than a transparent transportation of meanings across languages.

The myth of Babel is also a story about the sacred – the name of God is considered sacred. And the sacred is the proper name (un)translated into common name: God's name is given to translation, but its sacredness is its untranslatability. The sacred is also the secret calling for translation and, by extension, every poetic text is both sacred and secret: it asks for translation, for visibility, but its sacredness is what remains invisible, untranslated. Since translation is a double bind, necessary and impossible, the proper name effect is at work in the very process of translation in a way that the resistance to a definitive translation is produced by translation itself ("translate me, but don't translate me"). In other words, translation produces both a visible and an invisible operation in which visibility (translatability) displays its own invisibility (untranslatability). The relationship between invisibility and visibility represents the play between new possibilities of reading (of making the original visible) and the possibility of multiplying the secrets in translation (as resistance to translation itself). As Paulo Ottoni (2005) aptly claims, "there will always be in a text a secret that cannot be analyzed, but is necessary so that one might translate and read. When I translate I produce another secret that language imposes so that the text might exist and resist."³

Translation multiplies the secrets of the original text by producing *its own* secrets as an act of transformation. This assertion is particularly true when it comes to the translation of Harryette Mullen's poems into Portuguese. The different possibilities of interpreting the same passage of the translation – which is, in part, an outcome of the untranslatability of her poems generated by the resistance imposed by language – represent "secrets" because they are not necessarily visible in translation and they only allow themselves to be known when *they are made visible in their invisibility*, that is, within the potentiality of the *non-dit* of translation, produced through interpretation. It is in this sense that I maintain that the translation of Mullen's poetry is constructed within the

² In *Positions* (2004), Derrida claims that "in the limits to which it is possible, or at least *appears* possible, translation practices the difference between signified and signifier. But if this difference is never pure, no more so is translation, and for the notion of translation we would have to substitute a notion of *transformation*: a regulated transformation of one language by another, of one text by another." (p.19).

³ "Haverá num texto sempre um segredo inalisável, necessário para que se possa traduzir e se possa ler. Ao traduzir, produz um outro segredo que a língua impõe para que o texto possa existir e resistir." (p.102).

simultaneous conjunction of the visible and the invisible, which goes beyond communication.

Translation itself does not involve mere “communication,” since the latter presupposes a transmission or a transference of meanings and ideas, and translation produces meanings rather than transmitting them. In this regard, translation represents a necessarily regulated “rupture” with what is called the “original text.” It cannot transmit anything if, in fact, it transforms what is supposed to be “transmitted.” There is always a remainder⁴ in translation, a relationship with that which resists a definitive translation, which, in other words, resists the notion of communication (in its traditional sense): the reader cannot fully appropriate the text and make it “communicable”; there will always be a resistance that ultimately calls for readings that never exhaust such remainders: readings that will always delay communication.

It is possible to say that said resistance to translation is that which, paradoxically, calls for translation. It represents a “lack” in the original text that pleads for translation. The original is not “complete” or “communicable” — it requires that something else, that is, translation, give it a survival beyond languages. There is thus a genealogical relationship or debt between the original text and the translation, in which the original is the first debtor of said relationship. Based on his reading of Benjamin’s essay, Derrida (2007) points out that

The original is the first debtor, the first petitioner; it begins by lacking — and by pleading for translation. This demand is not only on the side of the constructors of the tower who want to make a name for themselves and to found a universal tongue that translates itself by itself; it also constrains the deconstructor of the tower: in giving his name, God also appeals to translation, not only between the tongues that had suddenly become multiple and confused, but of *his name*, of the name he had proclaimed, given, and which should be translated as confusion to be understood, hence, to let it be understood that it is difficult to translate and so to understand it. At the moment when he imposes and opposes his law to that of the tribe, he is also a petitioner for translation. He is also indebted. He has not finished pleading for the translation of his name even as he forbids it. For Babel is untranslatable. God weeps over his name. His text is the most sacred, the most poetic, the most originary, since it creates a name and it gives it to itself, but it is left no less destitute in its force and even in its very richness; it pleads for a translator. (p.207-8).

⁴ Based on the writings of Jacques Derrida, I would consider the remainder to be that which resists (a definitive) translation. Along these lines, Lawrence Venuti (1995) considers the remainder to be that which “exceeds transparent uses of language geared to communication and reference and may in fact impede them, with varying degrees of violence” (p. 216). Venuti (1998) asserts that language “is never simply an instrument of communication employed by an individual according to a system of rules.” Rather, language is “a collective force, an assemblage of forms that constitute a semiotic regime. Circulating among diverse cultural constituencies and social institutions, these forms are positioned hierarchically, with the standard dialect in dominance but subject to constant variation from regional or group dialects, jargons, clichés and slogans, stylistic innovations, nonce words, and the sheer accumulation of previous uses” (p. 10). Languages are thereby home to power relationships in which a “specific conjuncture of a major form holding sway over minor variables” (p. 10). According to Venuti, the remainder represents such variables. More importantly, Venuti claims that “any language use is prone to the unpredictable variation of the remainder, the collective force of linguistic forms that outstrips any individual’s control and complicates intended meanings” (p. 108).

The translator is an indebted subject obligated by a duty, occupying a position of heir. The translator faces the demand for translation imposed by the original text: “translate me.” On the other hand, the translator, as Derrida explains, is the “agent of survival.” The translator makes the survival of the authors’ names and of their signatures possible. More importantly, translation offers a “surplus of life”: “The work does not simply live longer, it lives *more and better*, beyond its author’s means” (2007, p. 203).

The translator’s debt does not imply that he or she is expected to give back a copy or a good image, nor a faithful representation of the original. As Derrida (2007) reminds us, “[the original], the survivor, is itself in transformation. The original gives itself in modifying itself and its gift is not that of a given object; it lives and lives on in mutation” (p. 206). A faithful representation of the original cannot be restituted because the original itself is in transformation. The lack in the original text demands mutation and survival — there will always be rupture and difference at the origin and translation multiplies the differences in the survival process, despite the alleged identification between the original text and the translation. The differences multiplied by translation should not be viewed as a failure, but as an inevitable (dis)continuation of the original text in mutation.

The translation of Harryette Mullen’s poems, especially from *Muse & Drudge*, represents the dissemination of meanings *in difference*, beyond the pure visibility of the original text. In that sense, the original in translation is made *simultaneously* visible and invisible, translated and untranslated. It is my belief that both untranslatability and translatability, visibility and invisibility, fluency and, at the same time, resistance to intelligibility are constitutive aspects of Mullen’s writing in translation. Every translated poem produces its own disjunctive mode of expression. Just as in jazz, where intelligibility and unforeseen experimentation get mixed up, it is the simultaneous relationship between the unexpected, invisible connections and the expected, visible contours that shapes the unique aesthetic experience of translating Harryette Mullen’s poetry.

3. THE TRANSLATION OF *MUSE & DRUDGE* (MUSA & MULA)⁵: EXPLORING BLACKNESS AND THE (UN)EXPECTED

Harryette Mullen is an African-American female poet and scholar, born in Florence, Alabama, but raised in Fort Worth, Texas. She is currently a Professor of American and

African-American Literature at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her emergence as a poet takes place in the early 80's, with the publication of her first book of poetry, entitled *Tree Tall Woman* (Energy Earth Press, 1981). She would only publish her next book of poetry ten years later, with *Trimmings* (1991, republished in *Recyclopedia*, 2006), followed by *S*PeRM**K*T* (1992, republished in *Recyclopedia*, 2006), *Muse & Drudge* (1995, republished in *Recyclopedia* 2006), *Blues Baby*, *Early Poems* (Bucknell University Press, 2002), and *Sleeping with the Dictionary* (University of California Press, 2002). The latter was nominated for a National Book Award, a National Book Critics Circle Award, and the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize. She has received a Gertrude Stein Award for innovative poetry, among other awards. Recently, in October 2007, Harryette Mullen, along with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ernest Hardy and Albert Ríos, received the 2007 PEN/Beyond Margins Award. On the PEN website it is claimed that "the works of this year's recipients span an impressive range, touching upon themes of deconstruction, regeneration, and the recycling of narratives and cultural detritus to create artwork of exceptional power and beauty" (PEN Beyond Margins Award). According to Cynthia Hogue,

Harryette Mullen is concerned to diversify the predominant aesthetic of "accessibility" that characterizes contemporary African American poetry and criticism. And Elizabeth Frost considers the book *Muse & Drudge* a "poetic hybrid" that draws on both Stein and blues, among other influences — a lyric long poem exploring "the diverse influences and languages of a miscegenated culture." (HOGUE, 1999, *par.* 2)

At the same time, Elizabeth Frost claims that,

Crossing the lines between often isolated aesthetic camps, Harryette Mullen has pioneered her own form of bluesy, disjunctive lyric poetry, combining a concern for the political issues raised by identity politics with a poststructuralist emphasis on language. Mullen challenges prevailing assumptions about the canons of contemporary poetry, seeking in particular to draw attention to the neglected traditions of African-American experimentalism from which her writing emerges. Influences on her work range widely, from Gertrude Stein to the Black Arts Movement, from Sappho to Bessie Smith, from Language poetry⁶ to rap. Mullen's allusive, playful texts have gained increasing attention in recent years, perhaps for the very reason that they are often hard to categorize. In her singular approach to poetics, Mullen raises important questions about tradition, innovation, and cultural identity. (FROST, 2000, p.397)

We could perhaps interpret the title *Muse & Drudge* as a relationship between the Muse, who offers an allegedly active, but never attainable dream (of pure identity) that serves as the inspiration to poets, writers, songwriters/blues men, etc. — and the Drudge, the supposedly passive being who has already been chewed-up; the worn-out path to the

⁵ "*Musa & Mula*" suggests a punning based on two possible meanings: "Muse and Mule" but also "*Musa emula*", that is, "Muse emulates."

⁶ "Language poetry" refers to the kind of poetry produced by the group originally known as the "*L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* poets," after the magazine that was issued with the same name. The group emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was highly influenced by the American modernist tradition, particularly Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky, and included poets such as Barret Watten, Ron Silliman and Charles Bernstein, among others. They came to be known as an *avant-garde* movement within US poetry, representing an example of poetic postmodernism in which writing itself challenges the

unattainable dream of the Muse. “Ketchup with reality” is a line from Mullen’s poem “what you do to me.” The wordplay at work between the homophones “ketchup” and “catch up” and their juxtaposition with the word “reality” is a pun that triggers issues of subjectivity, identity and discourse: to be a subject is to be one who is subjected to forces, social rules and impulses but, also, one who is said to be the source of an action. The subject, however, cannot avoid being the very object of its supposedly pristine, unchanging subjectivity. In connection with this reasoning, Harryette Mullen’s poems displace the limits that are often expected to shape the identity of African-American poetics as an expected, recognizable discourse about blackness. In her essay entitled “The cracks between what we are and what we are supposed to be: stretching the dialogue of African-American Poetry,” Harryette Mullen claims that “[the] discourse of ‘other blackness’ (rather than ‘black otherness’) has recently begun to move into a larger discussion of the multiplicity and dissonance — the flip side of unity or homogeneity — of African American cultures and identities” (p. 2). The author also maintains that

the exploratory interrogation of black identity as a social, cultural, and discursive formation raises critical questions about conventional representations of black identity, allowing the meanings of blackness to proliferate and expand, thus stretching black identity and making it more inclusive; but also allowing instability in defining what blackness is (p. 2).

This relation between inclusion and instability permeates the allusive textuality of *Muse & Drudge*. According to Elizabeth Frost, “Mullen’s associative compositions bring to light not randomness but unexpected likeness — among signifiers, the concepts they represent and the experiences they help construct. [...] In her highly playful texts, Mullen lets language reveal myriad, and unexpected, forms of kinship” (FROST, 2000, p. 406).

Harryette Mullen gathers and defamiliarizes idiomatic expressions and references from (African-) American culture, critically playing on the inevitable enforcement inherent in language/culture, including, but not limited to, its depiction of social and “racial” tensions, its critical and poetic possibilities of re-reading the relations between language, culture and reality, as well as how subjectivity and identity are displaced and formed. If Harryette Mullen’s poetry could be thought of as “stretching” black identity and making it more inclusive as well as “allowing instability in defining what blackness is,” this means that “blackness,” however culturally located or internationally marketed, is constantly under construction. Mullen’s own “translation” of blackness into poetry inscribes *difference* into every statement about blackness by making it not only or simply different from “whiteness” (as an ideological and traditional category), but, more importantly, by making blackness differ from itself. If we take

traditional expectations for the lyric presence of the speaker behind the text, by emphasizing the disjunction and the

seriously that there is no real “black” (or “white”) authenticity, but an ideological, historical and aesthetic construction built upon cultural discourses, it becomes clear that there is no purity or pure origin prior to the ideological conflicts seeking the affirmation of identity or blackness. Identity itself is a translation (or the multiple translations) of heritage, but heritage can only be taken to be known through the readings of identity, in other words, through translation, which is always performed in difference.

A poem, as a translation of a multitude of (collective and personal) experiences, enacts or performs the very experience it is purported to represent. Blackness or black identity, for instance, (in addition to what is foreign to itself), is not simply represented by poetry, but rather, reconstructed through every aesthetic production. This, in part, explains why Mullen's poetry, as Elizabeth Frost aptly reminds us, reveals “myriad, unexpected forms of kinship” (Frost 406). A highly playful and experimental form of poetry such as Mullen's, which has achieved quite a diverse readership in the USA and has prompted different responses, calls for a translation that might be able to simultaneously be acceptable and respond playfully to the original text.

On the other hand, precisely because translation engages in new cultural references and punning, the interpretations that might arise from a reading of the text in Portuguese can reach unexpected horizons, even if the translation itself is grounded in seemingly acceptable arguments. What cannot be prevented from taking place in translation, even if all the “calculation” is accounted for? In what ways might such (mis)calculation relate to identity, blackness and (in)visibility? What does it mean to engage in a “myriad of possibilities” (that do not point to any fixed or predictable targets) given the constraints that govern any translation?

In order to address these questions, I would like to discuss my translations of Mullen's poems taken from her book *Muse & Drudge*. I will analyze two translated poems with their respective back-translations. These poems have been selected because they exemplify different aspects connected with the issue of the (in)visible in the translation process.

Even if the translation is *intended* to be an acceptable reading of the original poem, it triggers interpretations that are not necessarily a result of an intentional, calculated translation strategy. Particularly when it comes to translating puns, even the most calculated combination between words and sounds cannot prevent the reader from producing new, possibly conflicting interpretations. In *Essays on Punning and Translation*,

materiality of the poem's signifiers.

Dirk Delabastita claims that “wordplay is traditionally defined as a *deliberate* communicative strategy, or the result thereof, used with a specific semantic or pragmatic effect in mind” (1997, p.06, my emphasis). My question, however, is to what extent does a deliberate, intentional act of creating a new pun in translation, no matter how formally “identical” to the original pun it might be, guarantee any similar ambiguities in the target culture? Delabastita (1997) in some way reinforces my question:

empirically speaking, it is pretty obvious that *not* every word in every text is a multiple pun, or certainly not to the same extent, or in the same way, as those puns that do stand out clearly to a wide circle of text users. In all linguistic communities and discursive practices there *do* seem to exist specific limits to the associative power of language. What is the precise nature of such checks on free association and unbound ambiguity? Questions like these defy an easy answer, but recognizing their pertinence is a first step. (p. 06).

There are certainly social limits to interpretation, but we cannot predict what these limits will look like, or how far they might reach in different contexts, at different times and in different environments. Even if I claim to know the linguistic aspects in which a piece of wordplay was conceived in the original text, I cannot guarantee how the corresponding translated pun might be read in the future. Even the concept of future itself cannot be viewed simplistically: future can range from the very moment my translation is finished (prior to any eventual publication) and might still be “contaminated” by my own interpretations that I could not anticipate during the translating process. In that sense, Delabastita (1997) recognizes that:

puns do not simply either exist or fail to exist, but have a **history**, sometimes a pretty eventful one. Certain generations or groups of readers are more responsive to semantic slippage or doubleness than others, and will rediscover or (should one say) invent puns by endowing potential double readings and verbal associations with a semantic substance, a communicative value, and a form of intentionality they did not possess before, perhaps not even in the minds of the text’s author or most immediate audience. (p. 07, author’s emphasis).

Although my translation of Mullen’s poems intends to provide an at least acceptable reading of the original text, it necessarily triggers different and possibly conflicting interpretive relations in Brazilian Portuguese, highly dependent on the reader’s background, cultural experience, and his/her responsiveness to the “semantic slippage or doubleness” that the translation evokes in his/her reading. Unexpected readings are thus produced by the proliferation of the effects of the visible and the invisible in the translation, which can be explored in the following poem, “sun goes on shining,” whose lines suggest scenes of violence against a woman and the image of a man whose physical power is ironically downplayed:

sun goes on shining	o sol brilha contra a garoa
while the debbil beats his wife	o belzeburro surra sua garota
blues played lefthanded	um blues de canhoto
topsy-turvy inside out	o avesso do avesso do avesso

under the weather
down by the sea
a broke johnny walker
mister meaner

bem baqueado
à beira mar
um johnny walker quebrado
senhor De Lito

bigger than a big man
cirrus as a heart attracts
more power than a loco motive
think your shit don't stink

maior que o maioral
tão sério que o coração se farta
mais potente que loco motiva
achar a tua merda não fedida

edge against a wall
wearing your colors
soulfully worn out
stylishly distressed

beirada contra a parede
vestindo tuas cores
de alma surrada
e dissabor refinado

(MULLEN, 1995, p. 05)

Back-Translation:

sun shines through/against the drizzle
the dumb/donkey-devil thrashes his girl
a blues played lefthanded
the inside out of the inside out of the inside out

under the weather/worn out
down by the sea
a broke(n) johnny walker
mister De Lito/ Mr. Misdemeanor

bigger than the biggest one
so serious/so hilly that it causes a heart attack
more powerful than a locomotive/loco motivates
to think that your shit doesn't stink

edge against the wall
wearing your colors
of beaten/worn-out soul
of refined taste/sorrow

According to Clarence Major (1994), in his *Juba to Jive: a Dictionary of African-American Slang*, the expression "[The] Devil is beating his wife," in African-American folklore, refers to a moment "when the sun appears while it's raining," and he adds: "It was believed that if you stick a pen into the ground and place your ear to it you can hear the blows" (p. 134). In the poem, the word "devil" is slightly modified with the insertion of a double "bb" ("debbil"), turning the devil into a "debilitating" creature. In Portuguese, "belzeburro" is a combination between "Belzebu" ("Beelzebuth") and "burro" (donkey/dumb). For the entire stanza in Portuguese, an effort has been made so as to bring out this relationship between disjunctive, but simultaneous events. Nonetheless, the underlying idiomatic expression concerning "a rainy, but sunny day" as if the devil "were beating his wife" remains, to some extent, untranslatable. This is the reason why I selected the word "garoa" ("drizzle") in the first line, in order to make a connection with "rain and

sun." On the other hand, "*garoa*" unexpectedly enables a shared cultural memory among Brazilians (specially from the city of São Paulo). This word is commonly associated with the typical drizzle that has become part of the daily life in the city of São Paulo (also called "*A Terra da Garoa*" /The Land of the Drizzle"). An additional, possible interpretation that might be unexpectedly raised with the word "*garoa*" is the elusive reference to the most traditional, well-known samba group from the city of São Paulo, still active for almost 60 years now, called "*Demonios da Garoa*" ("Demons of the Drizzle"), which, by the way, could perhaps be indirectly supported by the presence of "devil" in "*belzeburro*". The connection with samba in this line is not simply implicated, but, rather, it is an (in)visible possibility, since translation produces the *non-dit*, which might be made visible by interpretation itself.⁷

The line "blues played lefthanded" is translated into "*um blues de canhoto*," which also means "blues played lefthanded," but the phrase "*de canhoto*" might suggest a "lefthanded punch" as well. It is not impossible that the word "*canhoto*" unexpectedly triggers, among certain readers, a *non-dit* reference to the famous composer and guitar player "*Canhoto*," who lived in São Paulo during the early 20th century. His name was Americo Jacomino and he was known as "*Canhoto*," because he used to play the guitar with his left hand. He became known for having contributed to the ennobling of the acoustic guitar, since in his time it was still considered to be an instrument of the outcasts.

"Topsy-Turvy," in the fourth line, besides meaning "confused" or "upside down," could serve as an allusion to a female slave character featured in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Her name was "Topsy" and she used to defy "many of the manners and mores of (white) womanhood" (ABATE, p.62). This passage is exemplary of the problem of untranslatability, since it is difficult, if not impossible, to recreate the same literary reference in Portuguese, even though the novel has been translated into Portuguese. This is the reason why I have decided to bring into focus a different allusion, while still maintaining a semantic charge similar to that found in "topsy-turvy." The line "...*avesso do avesso do avesso*" might be read as an allusion to a song entitled "*Sampa*" by Caetano Veloso⁸. "*Sampa*" is an abbreviation for "the city of São Paulo." In "*Sampa*", composed as a *choro* ("cry" or "lament")⁹, a musical genre similar to samba, but generally played with different instruments and in different rhythmic patterns, Caetano describes

⁷ Such line of interpretation, with "*garoa*" being possibly linked to São Paulo and samba, is further supported by the translated fourth line of the first stanza ("*o avesso do avesso do avesso*"), which will be addressed shortly.

⁸ The song "*Sampa*" is available in Veloso, Caetano. *Antologia* 67/03. Universal, 2003.

⁹ *Choro* or *Chorinho* was developed in late 19th century in Rio de Janeiro. It was named after the type of crying harmony generated by the group of instruments used to play it: a seven-string acoustic guitar, a flute, a mandolin, a *cavaquinho* (similar to a little guitar) and a *pandeiro* (similar to a tambourine with inverted jingles).

the paradoxical feeling of being/living in Sao Paulo, a wealthy metropolis in a developing country — he talks about wealth, poverty, poetry and hope (for Africa and the Americas).¹⁰ Below is an excerpt of the song¹¹:

Sampa

Alguma coisa acontece no meu coração
Que só quando cruza a Ipiranga
e a Avenida São João
É que quando cheguei por aqui, eu nada entendi
Da dura poesia concreta de tuas esquinas
Da deselegância discreta de tuas meninas [...]
E foste um difícil começo,
afasto o que não conheço
E quem vem de outro sonho
feliz de cidade
Aprende depressa a chamar-te de realidade
Porque és **o avesso do avesso do avesso**
do avesso
[...]

Sampa

Something goes on in my heart
Only when Ipiranga Ave.
crosses Sao Joao Ave.
When I first got here I understood nothing
Of the tough concrete poetry of your corners
Of the discrete inelegance of your girls [...]
And you were a difficult start,
I push away what I do not know
And he who comes from
another happy city dream
Learns quickly to call you reality
For you are **the inside out of the inside out**
of the inside out
[...]

The line “a broke johnny walker” may refer to a “broken bottle of whisky” as well as to a man who is drunk and broke. In Portuguese, “*um johnny walker quebrado*” plays with both meanings, since “*quebrado*” refers to a broken bottle of whisky as well as to a broke man. “Mister meaner” may suggest a play on “misdemeanor,” an offense less serious than a “felony.” “*Senhor De Lito*,” or “Mr. De Lito,” sounds like a Spanish or Italian surname, but when the two parts of the name are read together it becomes “*delito*” or a misdemeanor.

“Cirrus as a heart attracts” might be read as a play on “serious as a heart attack,” and it has been translated into “*tão sério que o coração se farta*.” This phrase allows for a number of interpretations. The word “*sério*” means “hilly” (as in “hilly landscape”), but it also sounds like “*sério*” or “serious”. The verb “*se farta*” means “gets satisfied with” or even “gets fed up with.” In that regard, the whole phrase would be “(it is) so hilly or so serious that the heart gets fed up with or satisfied with.” Nonetheless the verb “*se farta*” in connection with the word “*coração*” (heart), gets closer in sound to “*se enfarta*” (“to have a heart attack”), in a way that the entire sentence could also be read as “so serious that the heart has an attack.” New associations proliferate in translation, and such disjunctive associations in Portuguese are in line with the unexpected relations that Harryette Mullen’s poetry is able to produce within the limits of the English context.

The line “more power than a loco motive” condenses both “a locomotive” and “a crazy motive” that can be linked to the following line: “think your shit don’t stink.” In

¹⁰ The song can be heard at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0KRUGGajto>

Portuguese, “*mais potente que loco motiva*” (“more powerful than a locomotive”) also produces another reading in which “*motiva*” (“motivates”) might be linked to the following line, “*achar a tua merda não fedida*” (“...motivates [you] to think that your shit is not stinking”). Also, “*achar*” means “to find,” which raises another unexpected possibility of reading (a very ironic reading, by the way): “... motivates [you] to find your non-stinking shit.”

In the last stanza, in “*beirada contra a parede*” (“edge against the wall”), the word “*beirada*” can be both a noun (“edge”) or a conjugated verb that means, in this line, “to be put against the wall.” As such, “*beirada*” could refer to a woman who is put against the wall. The translation brings into focus the image of a defenseless woman, in connection with the violence that the “*debbil/devil*” does to his wife in the second line of the original.

“Wearing your colors/soulfully worn out” has been translated as “*vestindo tuas cores/de alma surrada*.” The sentence is ambiguous, especially because of “*surrada*” (“worn-out” and “beaten up”): the sentence can mean “wearing your colors of worn-out soul” as well as “wearing your colors of beaten up soul.” Violence is thus, again, brought to the fore.

The last line “stylishly distressed” has been translated into “*dissabor refinado*.” The phrase “*dissabor refinado*” means “refined sorrow,” but it has the same sound as “*de sabor refinado*” (“of refined taste”). “*Refinado*” (“refined” or “elegant”) shares the same semantic area as “stylishly.” More revealingly is the unexpected, disjunctive association produced by “*dissabor refinado*,” that is, “of refined sorrow.” Such disjunctive association is in line with the idea of the “sun shining” despite the rain.

The poem above has been translated in order to reproduce the original text as closely as possible, but, just as in the case of the “shop window” mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the translated poem “reflects” the original text by producing new, visible and invisible connections that go beyond the expectations for direct “reflection” or pure equivalency: the translated poem raises disruptive associations that extend the possibilities of interpretation to new horizons, enriching the expressive fields of the poem in English within the territory of Brazilian cultural relations.

The next poem, “if your complexion is a mess” suggests the authoritarian voice of the global cosmetic industry, which offers whitening as the sole “solution” for black people. We could interpret the poem as suggesting that blacks are not welcome, almost as

¹¹ This song has been translated by Charles A. Perrone in “Performing Sao Paulo: Vanguard Representations of a Brazilian

if they were foreigners faced with a choice: either you whiten yourself to stay here, or you should "go back" to Africa:

if your complexion is a mess
our elixir spells skin success
you'll have appeal bewitch be adored
hechizando con crema dermoblanqueadora

what we sell is enlightenment
nothing less than beauty itself
since when can been in the dark
what shines hidden in dirt

double dutch darky
take kisses back to Africa
they dipped you in a vat
at the wacky chocolate factory

color we've got in spades
melanin gives perpetual shade
though rhythm's no answer to cancer
pancakes pale and butter can get rancid

(MULLEN, 1995, p. 34)

Back-Translation

if your complexion is excessively miscellaneous
our elixir is a spell of successful skin
it will have the seductive appeal to be adored
hechizando con crema dermoblanqueadora

what we sell is enlightenment/clarification
nothing less than beauty itself
why keep in the dark
what shines hidden in dirt

darky bonbon
send negrescos/oreos back to Africa
they dipped you in a vat
in the fantastic chocolate factory

color is what we have in spades
perpetual shade is what melanin gives
but the rhythm doesn't devastate the cancerous cell
pancake is pale and the butter is rancid

se a sua tez é miscelânea em excesso
nosso elixir é feitiço de pele do sucesso
vai ter o apelo sedutor ser adorado
hechizando con crema dermoblanqueadora

o que vendemos é esclarecimento
nada menos que a beleza em si
pra quê ficar no escuro
o que brilha oculto na sujeira

neguinho bom bom
manda negrescos de volta pra África
te mergulharam num tanque
na fantástica fábrica de chocolate

cor é o que temos pra dar com pá
sombra perpétua é o que a melanina dá
mas o ritmo não assola a célula cancerosa
pó compacto é pálido e a manteiga rançosa

The poem might be read as an ironic praise of whitening since it could be interpreted as the voice of the globalized cosmetic industry. In the first stanza we read: "our elixir spells skin success," by "bewitching with skin lightener cream," which is then presented in Spanish as "*hechizando con crema dermoblanqueadora*." The presence of Spanish in the poem makes the whitening process sound like merchandise that can be sold

overseas and become a global, exportable product. Another possible interpretation for this line might be motivated by the existence of a whole cosmetic industry focused on both African-American and Latino markets in the US.

In the second stanza, the first two lines read: “what we sell is enlightenment/nothing less than beauty itself.” “Enlightenment” refers to both “the state of understanding something” but also the possibility of making something literally “clearer” or whiter. This line has been translated as “*o que vendemos é esclarecimento*,” which means “what we sell is clarification.” “*Esclarecimento*” refers to “enlightenment,” but it also contains the stem “-clarecimento,” which is similar to “*clareamento*,” or “whitening.”

The third stanza reads: “double dutch darky/take kisses back to Africa/they dipped you in a vat/at the wacky chocolate factory.” “Double dutch” is a form of processing chocolate. Mullen explained via e-mail that it is “a process that removes some of the bitterness of natural cocoa, giving it a milder flavor” (Mullen, e-mail from the author, October 23rd, 2009). “Double-dutch,” might also refer to jump rope games. But most significantly, “double dutch darky” could be interpreted as a reference to the chocolate skin color of a black person. In addition there is a repetition of the consonant “d” throughout that could serve to evoke the alliterative phrases sung by children when they are playing jump rope games. I have chosen to translate this line as “*neguinho bom bom*,” since “*neguinho*” means *darky* and “*bom bom*” is a reference to a chocolate bonbon.

The line that follows, “take kisses back to Africa,” has more subtleties than might appear at first blush. As Mullen clarified, “‘kisses’ refers to actual kisses as well as Hershey’s milk chocolate candy Kisses in classic tear drop shape, often included as gifts or party treats for holiday celebrations such as Valentine’s Day or Christmas” (Mullen, e-mail from the author, October 23rd, 2009). Metaphorically speaking, “kisses,” as chocolate candies, might stand for black people who are expected to be sent back to Africa. This could be read as an allusion to the “Back-to-Africa movement,” also known as the “Colonization movement,” which originated in the United States in the 19th century and encouraged African-Americans to migrate to the Africa continent (cf. BARNES, 2004).

Translating “take kisses back to Africa” posed special challenges, especially when one considers that “kisses” are also a chocolate candy. “Kisses” means “*beijos*” in Portuguese, but there is no chocolate candy in Brazil known as a “*beijo*” or “*beijos*.” Nonetheless, there is an ambiguity related to the word “*beijinhos*” (or “little kisses”): it refers both to “kisses” and to a type of very popular sweet eaten mainly at birthday parties. The problem is that “*beijinhos*” are generally white (because they are made of

cream, milk and coconut) or beige, not black or brown. So, it would not make sense to take “*beijinhos*” back to Africa. After further research, I discovered another possibility (but with a different type of ambiguity). There is a chocolate cookie in Brazil called “*Negresco*,” which is the Brazilian version of the American “*Oreo*.” Since the term “*negresco*” contains the word “*negro*,” it is quite useful for my translation¹². The original line has therefore been translated into “*manda negrescos de volta para a Africa*” (“send negrescos back to Africa”). By doing so, it is possible that the reader makes the connection between the chocolate cookie (or, more exactly, the color of chocolate) and the black people who are associated with that chocolate candy, who “should” be sent back to Africa. The other option, with the word “*beijos*” (“kisses”) or simply “*beijinhos*” (“little kisses” or the coconut sweet) does not allow for the ambiguity to work. Mullen has pointed out that “the Negresco cookies remind [her] of Oreos, which in the US have the slang meaning of assimilated African Americans who are ‘black on the outside and white on the inside’” (Mullen, e-mail from the author, October 23rd, 2009).

The last two lines of the third stanza, “they dipped you in a vat/at the wacky chocolate factory” could be read as a possible allusion to the film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, in which five children go on a tour of a chocolate factory and have strange experiences, such as being dipped in a vat of chocolate. Interestingly enough, the film title in Brazilian Portuguese is “*A Fantástica Fábrica de Chocolate*” (“The Fantastic Chocolate Factory”), which fits quite well as a translation of the line “at the wacky chocolate factory.”

The last stanza might imply that the cosmetic industry offers color abundantly – “in spades” – even though melanin is said to be a perpetual shade, if not a shame: “color we’ve got in spades/melanin gives perpetual shade.” The first line has been translated as “*cor é o que temos pra dar com pá*,” which could be understood as “color is what we have in spades.” Even though the expression “*dar com pá*” suggests abundance, it can also indicate violence, since the phrase is semantically closer to “beat with a spade or with a hand shovel.” The translation produces an invisible association with violence that is brought to the fore (to “visibility”) through interpretation.

The last two lines offer the possibility of reading the voice of the cosmetic industry as presenting melanin as a form of cancer, for which no rhythm (no soul or funk music, for example) can offer an answer or a solution. Rhythm, in this line, could be read as an important symbolic aspect for cultures of African descent, understood as a form of

¹² “*Negresco*” with capital letter refers to the Brazilian chocolate cookie brand mark, whereas the term “*negresco*,” with a lowercase letter, refers to the same word contained in the line in Portuguese.

pride and a source of joy in the face of hardships many of which are derived from discrimination based on skin color. In that regard, “pancakes” cannot help, but instead can only “pale,” and the “butter can get rancid.” In the Portuguese translation, there was an effort to reproduce the parallel sounds in “no answer” and “to cancer” with “*não assola*” (“doesn’t devastate”) and “*célula cancerosa*” (“cancerous cell”). In addition, there are initial rhymes in “**p**ancakes” and “**p**ale,” which have been reproduced in Portuguese with “*pó compacto é pálido*” (“pancake is pale”). “Rancid” offers a certain internal rhyme with “cancer,” and in Portuguese the rhymes have been constructed with “*célula cancerosa*” (“cancerous cell”) and “*manteiga rançosa*” (“rancid butter”).

Even though the term “kisses,” which is a key term in the poem, has not been maintained in the translation, it warrants mention that “*negresco*” makes different, perhaps conflicting, but also welcome associations possible in Portuguese: the fact that the “*Negresco*” cookie is white on the inside and black on the outside, just like an “Oreo,” might be read differently by politically-engaged Afro-Brazilians, who criticize the general lack of “racial” awareness among most Brazilians of African descent. In that regard, since there has never been any “Back-to-Africa Movement” in Brazil, the phrase “*manda negrescos de volta para a África*” (“send negrescos back to Africa”) might even be read as a single counter-voice disrupting the mainstream voice of the colonized “system” of whitening represented by the cosmetic industry in the whole poem: blacks who are “white on the inside” are expected to go back to Africa and learn their cultural roots or, in other words, be “re-Africanized.” This interpretation is possible because Mullen’s stanzas are not strictly tied to a single interpretation: one line might offer a different voice that rises in contrast to the other voices present in the poem. Translation, in that sense, has taken the “invisible connections” produced by Mullen’s poems to their ultimate consequence in Portuguese, offering a proliferation of new sets of connections that are not simply visible or intelligible. They require the reader to engage in other possibilities of understanding the Portuguese lines in unforeseeable and incalculable ways. This is a form of resistance to definitive interpretation, which is also a “resistance to translation” occurring within translation itself. The reader gets entangled in a relationship between the visible and the invisible aspects being set forth by the “shop window” of the poem.

4. CONCLUSION: THE PLAY OF THE (IN)VISIBLE IN THE “SHOP WINDOW” OF TRANSLATION

Derrida’s *Des Tours de Babel* teaches us that the idiom — the “sacred” (or the “secret”) in language — carries with it an urge for translatability, while also simultaneously posing a

resistance to translation. In that regard, every act of translation entails a relationship between that which is translated (and made visible as well as intelligible through this act) and that which remains invisible and resists a definitive translation and, as such, requires further interpretations in search for intelligibility (or "visibility"). Because every act of translation necessarily entails a simultaneous relationship between translatability and the resistance to translation, it is necessarily an act of transformation. In other words, there is no pure visibility or pure equivalency or sheer transference of meanings across languages.

Translation, in that sense, represents a (dis)continuation of the original text, which survives in its mutation into another language. Especially in relation to Mullen's poems in translation, such (dis)continuation is built upon the relationship between what is made visible and the *non-dit* of the invisible in Portuguese, which calls for further interpretations and other semantic slippages and connections. Mullen's poetry plays off of ambivalences and cultural references as well as invisible, unexpected semantic connections that require an equally experimental form of translation to produce a (dis)continuation of the original. The translated poems "(dis)continue" the original poems in the sense that they experiment with other similarly related, but also unexpected connections in Portuguese.

The new connections created through translation open up space for thinking and questioning different issues that are no less important than the ones at stake in the original text. The translation of "kisses" (in "take kisses back to Africa") into "*negrescos*" brings forth a double reading in which two conflicting voices are at stake in the translation: the voice of the cosmetic industry and a new voice, possibly that of the "racially" and politically engaged Afro-Brazilian. If it is possible to interpret the cosmetic industry as playing a joke on blacks by saying that they "should be sent back to Africa," it is also possible to encounter, in translation, an additional and unexpected voice that actually downplays the discourse of whitening by ironically criticizing assimilated Afro-Brazilians ("the *negrescos*" or "*oreos*") who do not recognize their emotional bonds to Afro-Brazilian cultural roots or who may not be politically allied with Afro-Brazilian social concerns.

The richness of Mullen's poetry lies precisely in the possibilities of interpretation that an informed reader is capable of producing in relation to the allusions and elusive connections it brings about. The connections created in Portuguese not only reflect an attempt to recreate, in translation, the ambivalences of her poems, but they also point to the resistance to translation within translation itself, which has opened up new horizons of interpretation that enrich the possibilities of understanding an original text in its critical

relationship with the target text's cultural and ideological references. In that sense, even the author's interpretation of her own work does not exhaust the "resistance to a definitive translation" that her poetry poses as a play of the (in)visible in the "shop window" of language.

My translations of Mullen's poetry have produced a form of text in which the visible and the invisible are semantically intertwined: this is why blackness is not meant to be simply brought to visibility in translation. More importantly, an effort has been made to aesthetically assume that the complexity of blackness, as shown in Mullen's own poetry, goes beyond the notion of visibility itself. That said, these translations, among others not discussed here, bring the issue of readership into focus. Since Mullen's poetry is built upon slippages of meaning, and given that ambivalence is at the core of her writing, my translations into Portuguese pose at least two key questions: Would such ambivalence be likely to attract the attention of Brazilian readers who are less concerned with "racial" issues and more interested in aesthetic experimentalism? Would readers of Afro-Brazilian poetry be put off by said experimentalism, despite the fact that Mullen's poetry also critically engages issues such as race, gender and identity (but in a largely ambivalent mode)? I would like to think that Mullen's poetry is meant to achieve a diverse readership. The primary goal of these translations has been to reinforce, in Brazilian Portuguese, the possibilities of the production of meaning slippage and allusions that could somehow critically respond to the richness of Mullen's poetry.

As such, these translations, based on Mullen's own critical perspective, can play a double role: they can offer a critical response to the discourse according to which experimental poetry is not compatible with a social/"racial" critique; and they can also call into question the general standpoint that black poetry can only be constituted of "racial"/social critique rather than any formal experimentation. In that regard, on the one hand, it is hoped that these translations might be able to bring a reader, generally curious about formal experimentation, to engage with a text that offers a critique of "racial" and cultural identity by means of a disruptive, innovative language. On the other, I hope they might produce a positive, aesthetic "estrangement" among Afro-Brazilian readers (or readers keen on Afro-Brazilian poetry) who would not expect to see experimentation coupled with black poetry or, in other words, who would not expect to encounter disjunctive language coupled with a social/"racial" critique. This is an experience that may entail surprise, if not bewilderment and possible (and maybe necessary) frustration. It is the unexpected that *may or may not* enable a change of expectations and evaluation on behalf of the reader, in which case he or she *may or may not* more fully reflect on the

meanings of what black poetry might be and how it could relate to local and global commonalities as well as differences promoted by the black diaspora.

Mullen's work and the poetry by other poets of African descent (including, for example, contemporary Afro-Brazilian poets) represent different efforts to poetically translate the complexities of blackness. However, I am particularly interested in the logic that governs such "translations." They are bound by a relationship between translatability and the resistance to translation. The translatability of blackness refers to the different ways in which it has historically been read and interpreted in order to convey determined cultural meanings and to represent social concerns. Yet, blackness also resists the act of translation. It is precisely such resistance that calls for translation, for readings that ultimately never exhaust or fully appropriate the textuality of blackness as a cultural arrangement of signs. Blackness is thus translated, but remains untranslated at the same time. It remains both visible and invisible, expected and unexpected. The differences multiplied by translation represent a resistance to a definitive translation as well. In that regard, when it comes to the notion of blackness in poetry, it is worth noting not only the ways in which blackness resists a definitive translation, but also how every poem (or a translation of it) is a (dis)continuation of blackness. Or, in other words, it is precisely the process of discontinuation that represents the inevitable transformation of blackness itself.

WORKS CITED

- ABATE, M. Topsy and Topsy-Turvy Jo: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's cabin and/in Louisa May Alcott's little Women. **Children's literature**, 34, p. 59-82, 2006,
- BARNES, K. **Journey of hope: The back-to-Africa movement in Arkansas in the late 1800s**. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- DELABASTITA, D. (Ed). **Essays on punning and translation**. Manchester: St. Jerome, 1997.
- DERRIDA, J. **The ear of the other: otobiography, transference, translation**. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988.
- _____. Des tours de babel. Tradução de Joseph Graham. In: KAMUF, P.; ROTTENBERG, E. (Ed.) **Psyche: inventions of the other**. California: Stanford University Press, 2007. p. 191-225. Vol. 1.
- _____. **Positions**. Tradução de Alan Bass. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- FROST, E. An interview with Harryette Mullen. **Contemporary literature**, 41, p. 397-421, 2000.
- HOGUE, C. Interview with Harryette Mullen. **Postmodern culture**, 9.2, 1999. Disponível em: <<http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/pmc/v009/9.2hogue.html>>. Acesso em 03 jul. 2009.
- MAJOR, C. **Juba to jive: a dictionary of African-American slang**. New York: Penguin, 1994.
- MULLEN, H. **Recyclopedia: Trimmings, S*PeRM**K*T and Muse & Drudge**. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2006.
- _____. **Sleeping with the dictionary**. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.
- _____. **Blues baby, early poems**. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2002.
- _____. **Muse & drudge**. Philadelphia: Singing Horse Press, 1995.

_____. **Tree tall woman**. Energy Earth Press, 1981.

MULLEN, H. The cracks between what we are and what we are supposed to be: stretching the dialogue of African-American poetry. Disponível em:
<http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_5_2001/current/inconference/american-lit/mullen.html> Acesso em: 25 nov 2007.

OTTONI, P. **A tradução manifesta**: double bind e acontecimento. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2005.

PERRONE, C. Performing São Paulo: vanguard representations of a Brazilian cosmopolis. **Latin American Music Review**, 23.1, p. 60-78, 2002.

STOWE, H. B. **Uncle Tom's cabin**. Fairfield, IA: 1st World Publishing, 2004.

VENUTI, L. **The translator's invisibility**: a history of translation. New York: Routledge, 1995.

_____. **The scandals of translation**: towards an ethics of difference. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Lauro Maia Amorim

Bacharel em Letras Com Habilitação de Tradutor pela Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho (2000), localizada em São José do Rio Preto - SP, e Mestre em Estudos Linguísticos/Estudos da Tradução, pelo Programa de Pós Graduação Em Estudos Linguísticos da mesma instituição (2003). Sua dissertação de Mestrado foi selecionada para publicação pelo PROPP-Editora da Unesp, tendo sido publicada em 2006 com o título: 'Tradução e Adaptação: Encruzilhadas da Textualidade em Alice no País das Maravilhas, de Lewis Carroll, e em Kim, de Rudyard Kipling'. É Doutor em Translation Studies pelo Departamento de Literatura Comparada da State University of New York (SUNY), em Binghamton, onde desenvolveu pesquisa em Estudos da Tradução, com ênfase em tradução de poesia afro-americana contemporânea e questões de identidade.