Translating Oscar Wilde and Liam O'Flaherty

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Abstract: *Should the translator cater for the needs of the writer or for those of the reader? Should he/she remain as close to every single word of the original text as possible, sacrificing if necessary fluency and clarity; or should she/he interpret the text in a manner that ignores the spirit and foreign nature (i.e., tempo, character, concepts) of the original language as well as the author's peculiar way of thinking and feeling? Is there a third alternative, a middle way? Is every translation in fact an adaptation? I had to try to answer these questions when translating Oscar Wilde's An Ideal Husband and Liam O'Flaherty's The Informer. These are the questions one always faces when engaged in the challenging, often perilous, ever fascinating and enriching experience of translation.*

My aim in writing this paper was to share with fellow translators considerations and reflections, of my own and of others, on the act of translation. Despite the fact that as a professional translator I experience working conditions that differ from the conditions of those whose translations are part of their academic pursuits, I feel that we have much in common in the way of difficulties, enjoyment and enthusiasm. Therefore, I hope the insights, ideas, opinions and approaches that follow will be of some interest to translators in general.

According to the dictionaries, to translate a book is to express the sense of the book in another language, but is that really possible ? Of course perfect translations do not exist. They are just an ideal goal that we know we cannot possibly reach but of which nevertheless we must not lose sight. And this paradoxical combination of realism and idealism is the stuff translations are made of.

The Italian saying 'traduttore tradittore', meaning translator traitor, is a measure of a judgment that is unfair, simplistic and extremely harmful. Because of its negative assumption some translators may lower their standards and surrender to difficulties without a struggle. It may also give readers the defeatist attitude that sees all translations as hopelessly inaccurate. This is possibly the reason why poor translations are accepted

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by some publishers and by the public in general, who give the impression of not adopting any criteria regarding quality. They seem to believe that there is no such thing as quality where translations are concerned and that, since all translations are inaccurate, they are all more or less equivalent. Sometimes there appears to be a sort of conspiracy to advance the less than good, thereby implying that we should give up trying for any sort of too hard to reach excellence When, in fact, the quality of what we achieve depends on what we propose to achieve.

As so well expressed by Lord Goring in *An ideal husband*, 'Everything is dangerous. If it wasn't so, life wouldn't be worth living'…In translations as in life, it is all challenges, risks, adventure. Although perfection keeps eluding us, we keep trying to get as close to it as possible. This reaching for the moon, and when the moon is reached reaching for something else, is essentially human. It makes us restless and creative so that any degree of accomplishment and sanity is conditioned by the ability to push oneself to one's limits and to know when to stop.

Oscar Wilde made an art of pushing himself, of living on the edge. Brilliant, sensitive and versatile, he knew that it is impossible to be fully understood as a human being or as a writer. Using different forms of expression, he sent out signals as precise as signals can be pointing to what he really meant and could not possibly express despite his genius. This predicament we all share with him no matter how clever, educated or ignorant we are. Even when engaged in the most trivial conversation, we are not able to say exactly what we think and feel. Some will argue that we don't really want to say what we think and feel and that we actually hide behind language. But that is another story and does not concern us here. Here we start from the premise that we long to be capable of true communication, which of course we all do occasionally at least. The problem is that we are forced to give up saying many things because language has no words for them. There is much we have to leave unsaid and every time we pick a word to use we are abandoning many other possibilities. John Keats, acutely aware of the vast universe of the inexpressible, wrote: 'Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter.'

Naturally translations are particularly affected by the shortcomings of language. On top of all the difficulties inherent to communication, it has to deal with the characteristics and limitations of two languages, two human beings, two different sets of concepts, two different tempos and styles, two peculiar ways of thinking and feeling. Why attempt such a hopelessly complex task?

Certainly it is hard but, when one is lucky enough to translate works of quality, it is also a great pleasure to plunge into the universe of a writer and reveal it to others. Ideally the immersion should be complete. The translator should inhabit the territory of the work being translated, go around everything in it, look closely, listen, taste, touch, smell. It is not enough to picture in his mind what he is reading about, he has to believe it fully and study it like an actor learning a part. Therefore, translators should not be encouraged or expected to meet unreasonable deadlines. They should always be given enough time to do their work well, out of respect for themselves, the original author and

the readers. They should be allowed the gratification of not selling themselves short and of doing their very best. In José Ortega y Gasset's opinion 'no writer should denigrate the occupation of translating, and he should complement his own work with some version of an ancient, medieval, or contemporary text. It is necessary to restore the prestige of this labour and value it as an intellectual work of the first order'.

Intellectual work that is both demanding and modest. The expression 'reading between the lines' describes the active part we have to play if we want to try to understand our fellow man through his spoken or written word. And in order to read between the lines, we have to exercise our imagination, our creativity, therefore imprinting the information we receive with our own individuality, our own interpretation, our own knowledge. In *An Ideal Husband*, Lord Goring responds to anglophile Vicomte de Nanjac's 'I read all your English newspapers, I find them so amusing' with 'Then, my dear Nanjac, you must certainly read between the lines' [*Eu leio todos os jornais ingleses, acho que são tão divertidos. Então, meu caro Nanjac, você deve ler nas entrelinhas*.] Yet, the translator must be prepared to keep a low profile, to resist the temptation, sometimes strong, to modify or 'improve' the original text.

The French poet Paul Valéry comments on his translation of Virgil:

> After a while, as I went on with the translation – making, unmaking sacrificing here and there, restoring as best I could what I had first rejected this labour of approximation with its little successes, its regrets, its conquests, and its resignations produced in me an interesting feeling, of which I was not immediately aware and which it would be better not to confess, if I cared about other readers than those reflective enough to understand it. […] I caught myself wanting to change something in the venerable text. It was a naïve and unconscious identification with the imagined state of mind of a writer in the Augustan age. […] At bottom there are always the same problems – that is, the same attitudes: the 'inner' ear alert for the possible, for what will murmur 'of itself' and, once murmured, will return to the condition of desire; the same suspense and the same verbal crystallizations; the same oriented sensitivity of the subjective vocabulary, as though all the words in the memory were watching their chance to try their luck in reaching the voice.

Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*, produced at a time when other playwrights were turning to realism, is a splendidly artificial play dedicated to the power of words. The characters seem to come to life in order to speak their lines. There is no feeling of things left unsaid for lack of means to express them. It seems to be all there by virtue of its sparkling irony that expresses it indirectly, allowing for, without seeming to demand, almost limitless 'reading between the lines'.

In fact a play about serious values, it mostly sounds flippant and trivial. In Act III, for example, Phipps, Lord Goring's butler, apologises for the buttonhole that does

not quite meet with his lordship's approval: 'I will speak to the florist, my lord. She has had a loss in her family lately, which perhaps accounts for the lack of triviality your lordship complains of in the buttonhole'. To which Lord Goring replies: 'Extraordinary thing about the lower class in England – they are always losing their relations'. And Phipps promptly concludes: 'Yes, my lord! They are extremely fortunate in that respect'. [*'Vou falar com a florista, senhor. Ela perdeu um membro da família recentemente, o que talvez explique a insuficiente inconseqüência da flor'. 'Coisa extraordinária o que acontece com a classe operária da Inglaterra - está sempre perdendo parentes'. 'É verdade, senhor! É muito afortunada nesse particular'.*]

The play tells the story of Sir Robert Chiltern, a presumptive ideal husband, politician and human being whose past has not been as honourable, honest and morally unassailable as it should be. On the verge of ruin, he is rescued by his best friend and the play's main character, Lord Goring who, by contrast to Sir Robert, is thought to be idle, frivolous and useless. Wilde states that Lord Goring, 'the first well-dressed philosopher in the history of thought', a gentleman with 'a well-bred expressionless face', is a romantic in spite of himself 'fond of' being misunderstood'. Very much like the author, of course. He is also the moral voice in the play. But even when uttering grave and surprisingly wise remarks, his sentences are beautifully well balanced, every word sounding crisp and fresh and exactly right. Moreover, he does not even then give up his clever maxims and witty repartees. When Sir Robert thanks him: 'You have enabled me to tell you the truth', he answers: 'Ah! The truth is a thing I get rid of as soon as possible! Bad habit, by the way. Makes one very unpopular at the club…with the older members. They call it being conceited. Perhaps it is' [*'Você me possibilitou dizer a verdade'. 'Ah, a verdade é uma coisa de que me livro logo que posso! Um mau hábito, aliás. Faz com que se perca a popularidade no clube [...] entre os membros mais velhos. Eles chamam de convencimento. Talvez seja'.*]

Some of the characters make no secret of the fact that they live in fantasyland and are not usually trying to communicate thoughts or feelings when they speak. They are just making entertaining noises to distract themselves and others from thoughts and feelings. They are wearing masks and are not prepared to take them off. Including, of course, the above- mentioned Phipps, the Ideal Butler, who is described as 'a mask with a manner'.

Everyone displays wonderful language control and, apart from the rather pompous Sir Robert and his unmasked wife Gertrude, nearly everyone is a master of wit. Even Lady Markby who, according to the crafty and down to earth Mrs Cheveley, "talks more and says less than anybody I ever met", is remarkably articulate and amusing. The language she and all the other characters use is not only faultless but also rather formal in register, less due to the vocabulary than to its structural elegance, while sounding extremely easy on the ear. Complaining of her husband's behaviour she declares:

> [...] since Sir John has taken to attending the debates regularly, which he never used to do in the good old days, his language has become quite impossible. He

> always seems to think that he is addressing the House, and consequently whenever he discusses the state of the agricultural labourer, or the Welsh Church, or something quite improper of that kind, I am obliged to send all the servants out of the room. It is not pleasant to see one's own butler, who has been with one for twenty-three years, actually blushing at the sideboard, and the footmen making contortions in corners like persons in circuses. I assure you my life will be quite ruined unless they send John at once to the Upper House. He won't tale any interest in politics then, will he? The House of Lords is so sensible. An assembly of gentlemen'.[...] *desde que Sir John começou a freqüentar os debates regularmente, o que ele nunca fazia nos bons tempos, a linguagem dele ficou insuportável. Ele parece que pensa sempre estar se dirigindo ao plenário e, conseqüentemente, quando discute a situação do trabalhador agrícola, ou a Igreja do País de Gales, ou algum assunto inconveniente como esses, sou obrigada a mandar os criados saírem da sala. Não é agradável ver o seu próprio mordomo, com vinte e três anos de casa, chegando ao ponto de enrubescer ao lado do aparador, e os lacaios se contorcendo pelos cantos como se fossem de circo. Garanto-lhes que minha vida será totalmente destruída a não ser que mandem Sir John para a Câmara dos Lordes imediatamente. Aí ele perderá todo interesse na política, não é mesmo? A Câmara dos Lordes é tão sensata. Uma assembléia de cavalheiros.*]

In my translation of the speech I have attempted to maintain the rather formal elegance, which contributes to the humour, while making it sound good to the Brazilian ear.

Clearly Lady Markby, with her non-stop commentary on the mores and manners of her class and times, reflects Wilde's fierce criticism of English nineteenth century society even more than other characters in the play:

> Season as it goes on produces a kind of softening of the brain. However, I think anything is better than high intellectual pressure. That is the most unbecoming thing there is. It makes the noses of the young girls so particularly large. And there is nothing so difficult to marry as a large nose; men don't like them. [...] In my time, of course, we were taught not to understand anything. That was the old system, and wonderfully interesting it was. I assure you that the amount of things I and my poor dear sister were taught not to understand was quite extraordinary. [...] *à* medida que a Estação vai passando, provoca nas pessoas uma espécie *de amolecimento cerebral. No entanto, acho qualquer coisa* preferível a uma forte pressão intelectual. Isso é a coisa mais deselegante que existe.Faz os narizes das moças acentuadamente grandes. E não há *nada mais* difícil de casar do que um nariz grande; os homens não gostam. [...] No meu tempo, naturalmente, nos ensinavam a não entender nada. Era o sistema antigo e era incrivelmente interessante. Eu lhes garanto que era extraordinária a quantidade

de coisas que eu e minha pobre e querida *irmã tínhamos que aprender a não entender.*]

Occasionally, however, she gives hints to the fact that she is not so absolutely feather-brained as she may seem: 'Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly. I have known many instances of it'. [*Nada é tão perigoso como ser moderna demais. Fica-se com uma tendência a virar antiquada de repente. Conheço vários exemplos disso.]*

What can a translator do but relish Wilde's superb dry humour and style, and approach the task with the determination to be as faithful to his spirit and as close to his words as humanly possible? And that is the attitude that seems appropriate whoever the author may be. An attitude of respect for the creative artist and his work, for the tone of the original language and the author's rhythm and style. All this should be accomplished without sacrificing fluency and clarity. The reader must be made to travel to what is foreign to him, which is an integral part of the enriching exercise of reading, while being given the means to appreciate it.

Not easy to do, I grant you, when you realize that the pictures that come to one's mind depend on one's individual and linguistic experience. Suffice to say that different people have different mental pictures of things as ordinary as an apple, for example. To some it is a sweet red fruit; to others, a rather acid green one, while still others wouldn't know how to picture an apple. A language reflects the instincts, climate, ways of behaviour and thought of the people who speak it as their mother tongue. A responsible translator cannot afford to ignore these facts and should make use of explanatory footnotes whenever necessary. Transposing an original cultural image, for instance, to the reader's cultural environment seems to me to be a lack of respect for both the author, for obvious reasons, and for the reader, who is denied an insight into the foreign culture. The other night I was watching TV and saw and heard more or less the following. Original text : 'You're only interested in photographs that show cleavages.' Translation: 'You're only interested in photographs that show mini skirts'. The translator disregarded the fact that in America men are supposed to have a rather obsessive interest in female breasts, and transformed it into the supposedly Brazilian male equally obsessive interest in the female behind, thus making watchers believe the latter to be a universal complaint. What does it matter, you may ask, unless one is a psychologist or psychoanalyst? To me, a translator, it matters a great deal as a sign of a tendency to spare readers and watchers the effort of becoming aware of cultural differences. An unrealistic denial of these differences makes it more difficult, not easier, for different peoples to understand each other. It plagues people with misapprehensions and misplaced assumptions

concerning others, supported by the old cliché that 'people are the same everywhere.' Yes, of course we are all basically the same species, but the means and ways by which we express and exercise our basic sameness vary greatly. Moreover, 'one thinks differently in every language', affirms Arthur Schopenhauer. I believe that to deny this is to refuse to widen our intellectual and emotional horizons. Respect for the foreign in the original source-language text brings with it a desire to adjust and adapt to the foreign. According to J. P.Vinay and J. Darbelnet, the act of translation demands some met linguistic knowledge, which is supported at the end of the day by the knowledge of man, his philosophy and his environment, and this not only makes it humanistic but also gives it a place among the most spirit-shaping activities. In the words of Octavio Paz,

[...] while translation overcomes the differences between one language and another, it also reveals them more fully. Thanks to translation, we become aware that our neighbours do not speak and think as we do. On the one hand, the world is presented to us as a collection of similarities; on the other, as a growing heap of texts, each slightly different from the one that came before it [...] No text can be completely original because language itself, in its very essence, is already a translation – first from the nonverbal world, and then, because each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign, another phrase. However, the inverse of this reasoning is also entirely valid. All texts are originals because each translation has its own distinctive character. Up to a point, each translation is a creation and thus constitutes a unique text.

Arthur Waley argues:

A French scholar wrote recently with regard to translators: *They should make* themselves invisible behind the texts and, if fully understood, the texts will *speak for themselves.* Except in the rather rare case of plain concrete statements such as *The cat chases the mouse*, there are seldom sentences that have exact word-to-word equivalent in another language. It becomes a question of choosing between various approximations…I have always found that it was I, not the texts, that had to do the talking. [...] Every word holds a certain number of implicit meanings; when a word is combined with others to make up a phrase, one of those meanings is activated and becomes predominant.

In the case, for example, of idiomatic expressions, once one has looked in vain for a parallel expression, words in the target language must be found to communicate the idea of the original. According to Eugene A. Nida in *Language Structure and Translation*, 'The relevant unit of meaning for the translator is not the word, but the message'. Literal translations often sound awkward, can distort the original meaning

and be said to betray the object of the author. A case in point is Mabel Chiltern's response to Lady Chiltern: 'I assure you she is coming upstairs, as large as life and not nearly so natural'. Instead of choosing to keep the word *life* ('grande como a *vida* e bem menos natural'*)* in a literal translation so as to use Mabel's pun, thus not only forcing the Portuguese words into an expression that does not exist in Portuguese, but also altering the meaning, I opted to communicate what the expression actually signifies: '*Eu garanto que ela está subindo as escadas ostensivamente, em pessoa, e uma pessoa nem um pouco natural'*.

Some of the traps any translator worth his salt must be able to recognize as such are deceptive cognates that look similar or even identical but have acquired different meanings in different cultures. However, cognates are not just deceitful, many of them, relating to beings, things, concepts, abstractions, qualities and actions, 'hide' behind a meaning and give rise to delicate problems of non-translatability. Noam Chomsky stresses the fact that

> The existence of deep-seated formal universals [...] implies that all languages are cut to the same pattern, but does not imply that there is any point by point correspondence between particular languages. [...] The possibility of a reasonable procedure for translation between arbitrary languages depends on the sufficiency of substantive universals. In fact [...] there is little reason to suppose that reasonable procedures of translation are in general possible.

When Vladimir Nabokov declares that 'The person who desires to turn a literary master-piece into another language, has only one duty to perform, and this is to reproduce with *absolute exactitude* (the italics are mine) the whole text, and nothing but the text', he seems to be arguing for as literal a translation as possible and to be asserting his disregard of linguistic conditions that do not allow for absolutes. However, later on in his article, referring directly to his own translation of Pushkin's *Onegin*, he states that he had to give up translating the poem in rhyme and that 'It is possible to translate *Onegin* with *reasonable accuracy* (the italics are mine) by substituting for the fourteen rhymed tetrameter lines of each stanza fourteen unrhymed lines of varying length, from iambic diameter to iambic pentameter'. In other words, this major author, possessing an extraordinary mastery of both the Russian and English languages, finds himself forced to compromise, to be contented with *reasonable accuracy* in his translation of a major poet. He tries to compensate for this by describing 'in a series of footnotes the modulations and rhymes of the text as well as all its associations and other special features'. It would seem that in fact he has not actually translated the poem, he has transposed it, which many consider the only way to deal with poetry. Nevertheless, when he affirms that 'The clumsiest literal translation is a thousand times more useful than the prettiest paraphrase' and that 'anything but that (literal translation) is not truly a translation but an imitation, an adaptation or a parody', what he is really doing, I think, is echoing Rudolf Pannwitz's words:

> Our translations, even the best, proceed from a false premise. […] They have a much greater respect for the little ways of their own language than for the spirit of the foreign work. The fundamental error of the translator is that he maintains the accidental state of his own language, instead of letting it suffer the shock of the foreign language. He must […] penetrate to the ultimate elements of language itself, where word, image, tone become one; he must widen and deepen his language through the foreign one.

That is to say, translation revitalizes language.

The Informer is quite a contrast in subject matter, atmosphere and style to *An Ideal Husband.* Written by Liam O' Flaherty, it is intense and filled with realistic descriptions of people, places and situations. Set against the background of 1920's Ireland, it deals seriously with serious life and death issues. All through the book, register and rhythm keep changing as one goes from the crude language of the uneducated to the smoother, more refined language of Mary McPhillip and Gallagher, and the powerful, expressive language of the author as narrator.

The novel follows the anti-hero Gypo Nolan's Calvary all the way to his assassination. And it carries us with it. Along the way, Gypo undergoes changes of circumstances and of attitude. A destitute and lonely underdog when first introduced to us, with no place in society or outside it, he goes from near despair to arrogance and, in the end, terror. His use of language reflects his different moods. Initially monosyllabic, he becomes talkative and loud from the moment he realizes he can make some money and thus give himself the luxury of a warm bed and plenty to eat, among other things. As he grows in stature in his own eyes, and no longer sees himself as a nobody, his confidence is reflected in his desire to express himself, or just hear himself. Frank McPhillip, his ex-companion and the man he will betray, notices it: 'Where the divil did ye get all the gab?' he cries out. 'I never knew ye to let out all that much talk in a day, or maybe a whole week.' he adds, and asks '[...] what ails ye?' [*Que diabo deu em você que tá tão tagarela? Nunca vi cê falá tanto num dia, até numa semana inteira [...] que bicho te mordeu?]* We, the readers, suspect that we know what 'ails' Gypo. We have been given a glimpse into his mind. 'A monstrous idea had prowled into his head, like an uncouth beast straying from a wilderness into a civilized place where little children are alone.'[*Uma idéia monstruosa invadira a cabeça dele, como uma fera bravia que tivesse se desviado da floresta e penetrado em um lugar civilizado ondes criancinhas estão sozinhas.*]

O'Flaherty counterpoints the vivid scenes of Gypo in the external world with Gypo inside his own head. In his head Gypo tries to understand what happens to him. It is there that this violent, bullying, simple-minded giant on the rampage succeeds in moving us. Often making use of very effective figurative language, the author exposes Gypo's pathetic humanity, his ordeal, his voiceless, excruciating pain.

> Gypo's mind was looking at that uncouth ogre that was prowling about in his brain. […] Two facts rumbled about in his brain, making that loud primeval noise, which is the beginning of thought […] First, the fact of his meeting with McPhillip. Second, the fact of his having no money to buy a bed for the night. These two facts stood together in an amorphous mass [...] [*A mente* de Gypo estava olhando para o ogro bravio que rondava à espreita em seu *cérebro.* […] *Dois fatos reboavam em seu cérebro, fazendo aquele* barulho alto e primitivo que é o começo do pensamento [...] Primeiro, o fato de seu encontro com McPhillip. Segundo, o fato de que ele não tinha dinheiro *para pagar por uma cama para passar a noite*.]

The deed having been done, Gypo soon becomes aware of his guilt and of the threat that the Revolutionary Organization represents to him. They are bound to suspect him, hunt him and execute him. From then on he is on the run enjoying few confident or peaceful intervals. During one of these intervals, Gypo once again shows his mind to be split into two parts one of which feels foreign to him:

> Into his resting mind pleasant memories came, distant pleasant memories like day-dreams on a summer day, dreamt on the banks of a rock-strewn river, among the flowering heather. They were memories of his youth. They came to him in a strange bewildered manner, as if afraid of the dark, ferocious mind into which they came. Gypo stared at them fiercely, with bulging lips, as if they were enemies taunting him. Then gradually he softened towards them. Then a mad longing seized him for the protection of the environment of his youth… [*Para sua mente repousada vieram agradáveis* recordações, recordações distantes e agradáveis como se estivesse sonhando acordado em um dia de verão, sonhando às margens de um rio cheio de pedras, no meio da urze florida. Eram recordações de sua juventude. Chegaram a ele de um modo estranho e desnorteado, como se temessem a mente escura e feroz na qual penetravam.. Gypo olhou para elas fixamente, com olhos ameaçadores e lábios protuberantes, como se fossem inimigas escarnecendo dele. Depois, aos poucos, foi se enternecendo com elas. Então tomou conta dele uma louca saudade do ambiente protetor de sua *mocidade* [...]
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> And, a hundred and forty pages later, before the Revolutionary Court:
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> A succession of terrors flitted through his mind. They were not ideas or thoughts, but almost tangible terrors that seemed to materialize in his brain as the result of the reasoning of some foreign being. His cunning and his assurance were gripped suddenly by that amazing foreigner and hurled out of him, clean out of him into oblivion, like two bullets fired into the air.

In my translation of the above passage I substituted *head* for *mind* in the first sentence. My reason for doing it is that the word *mente*, which in Portuguese is mostly

used in specific contexts, would sound clumsy to me in the sentence. I felt I was not betraying the original since O'Flaherty often uses *head* and *mind* as interchangeable synonyms. Another problem was the language of the last sentence, so vivid, so beautifully balanced. The literal translation of *clean out of him* would be: *completamente (para) fora dele* and the last sentence would then read: *Sua astúcia e sua autoconfiança foram agarradas subitamente por aquele espantoso estranho e arremessadas para fora dele, completamente para fora dele e para dentro do esquecimento, como duas balas atiradas no ar*. I did not think this sounded at all good so I chose to ignore the words *clean out of him* and render their sense instead. And what they are doing is emphasizing the preceding *hurled out of him*, which the repetition emphasizes anyway. Only they are doing it while preserving the rhythm and 'melody' that a literal translation would destroy, I think. I do believe that O'Flaherty wouldn't have minded as I believe that to be faithful to the author is also to try not to destroy the beauty he has created with his language. Therefore my final version of the passage was: *Uma sucessão de terrores passaram rapidamente por sua cabeça. Não eram idéias ou pensamentos, e sim terrores quase tangíveis que pareciam se materializar em seu cérebro como resultado do raciocínio de algum ser estranho para ele. Sua astúcia e sua autoconfiança foram agarradas subitamente por aquele espantoso estranho e arremessadas para fora dele, arremessadas para fora dele e para dentro do esquecimento, como duas balas atiradas no ar.*

Oh, the fascinating intricacy of languages!.. How did it all begin? The Segond Bible, published in 1910, has its version:

> Those are the sons of Sem, according to their families, their tongues, their countries, their nations. Such are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, their nations. And it is from them that emerged the nations which spread over the earth after the flood. All the earth had a single tongue and the same words. As they had left the origin they found a plain in the country of Schinear, and they dwelt there. They said to one another: Come! Let us make bricks, and bake them in the fire. And brick served them as stone, and tar served as cement. Again they said: Come! Let us build ourselves a city and a tower whose summit touches the heavens [...]

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