



## Missing in Portuguese: Prolegomenon to a Translation of Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*

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Missing in Portuguese is a translation of Cormac McCarthy's fourth novel, *Suttree*.<sup>1</sup> Why should this be of concern? Because Portuguese is a major world language,<sup>2</sup> Cormac McCarthy is one of the most acclaimed contemporary American novelists, and *Suttree*, published in 1979, is one of his most lauded novels. McCarthy—winner of a prestigious MacArthur Fellowship (1981), also known as the “genius grant,” the National Book Award (1992) and National Book Critics Circle Award (1992) for his novel *All the Pretty Horses*, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (2007), and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction (2007) for *The Road*—is a high priest among American writers. While eight of his ten novels have been translated into Portuguese—*O Guarda do Pomar* in 1996 [*The Orchard Keeper*, 1965], *Filho de Deus*, 1994 [*Child of God*, 1974], *Meridiano de Sangue*, 2006 [*Blood Meridian*, 1985], *Todos os Belos Cavalos*, 1993 [*All the Pretty Horses*, 1992], *A Travessia*, 1999 [*The Crossing*, 1994], *Cidades da Planície*, 2001 [*Cities of the Plain*, 1998], *Onde os Velhos Não Têm Vez*, 2007 [*No Country for Old Men*, 2005] and *A Estrada*, 2007 [*The Road*, 2006]—*Suttree* awaits its rightful rendition into this major literary language as well.<sup>3</sup> The translation-to-be will require the talents of a master wordsmith in order to felicitously bring the novel's many complexities into Portuguese, and doing so will enrich the library of world literature available in the Portuguese language.

In addition to his ten novels, Cormac McCarthy has also published one screenplay, *The Gardener's Son: A Screenplay* (1996), and two plays, *The Stonemason: A Play in Five Acts* (1994) and *The Sunset Limited: A Novel in Dramatic Form* (2006).<sup>4</sup> In the United States, his oeuvre has garnered him encomia such as the following:

- “...without parallel in American writing today” (Alan Cheuse, *USA Today*)
- “McCarthy is a writer to be read, to be admired, and quite honestly—envied” (Ralph Ellison)
- “McCarthy is a born narrator, and his writing has, line by line, the stab of actuality. He is here to stay” (Robert Penn Warren)
- “Like the novelists he admires—Melville, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner—Cormac McCarthy has created an imaginative oeuvre greater and deeper than any single book. Such writers wrestle with the gods themselves” (Michael Dirda, *The Washington Post Book World*)
- McCarthy’s prose is so melodious that it demands to be read out loud. . . His fiction is heroic and somber, awe-inspiring and ruefully comic. . . [He] engages with the tremendous questions of life and death and has the weight to take them on” (Lucy Hughes-Hallett, *The Sunday Times*, London)
- “With each book he expands the territory of American fiction” (Malcolm Jones, *Newsweek*)

Within the context of such plaudits, *Suttree*, the last of McCarthy’s novels to be set in Appalachian East Tennessee<sup>5</sup>—from the Tennessee and French Broad rivers and Knoxville into the Great Smokies, with a surrealistic, fever-ridden excursion over the mountains to Asheville in western North Carolina—, occupies its own special high ground. Stanley Booth has written that “All of McCarthy's books present the reviewer with the same welcome difficulty. They are so good that one can hardly say how good they really are... *Suttree* may be his magnum opus... probably the funniest and most unbearably sad of McCarthy's books... which seem to me unsurpassed in American literature.” Daniel Weiss, in the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, has concluded that with *Suttree* “Mr. McCarthy's bid to be accepted as a

major American writer wins the pot. He is good, very good... This is perhaps the best novel of river life in mid-continent America since *Huckleberry Finn*. Mr. McCarthy's Knoxville and his Tennessee speak to us in language so true and pure it hurts.”<sup>6</sup>

The meandering, happenstance plot of *Suttree* follows Cornelius (“Bud” or “Buddy”) Suttree (aka “Sut”), a college dropout, who has decided to quit his comfortable family circumstances for a below-the-poverty-line subsistence as a river fisherman dwelling in a decaying houseboat. The protagonist drifts in search of meaning and identity among the hardscrabble Knoxvilleian subalterns who populate the ramshackle sub-urban banks of the “septic” (119) Tennessee River, “Cloaca Maxima” (13), in 1950-1952. It is a novel about “derelicts” (150, 264, 431), “lowlifes” (157) and “busted out bums” (157) in Knoxville, a cast of delinquents who survive among, and as, the “offal” (403), “detritus” (411) and “squalor of the life below” (447) in this southern city’s “galactic drainsuck” (453) and the “universe’s renal regions” (461). Although not at all devoid of peccant humor—one recalls critic Noel Polk’s bemused tip of the hat to “the narrative that introduces Harrogate in his famous tryst with the watermelons. Has anybody ever made such a spectacular entrance into a work of fiction?” (14)—, the novel is a sobering cautionary tale: “there are no absolutes in human misery and things can always get worse” (372) and “all souls are one and all souls lonely” (459). In the end, as Suttree admonishes the reader in the closing lines of the novel: “Somewhere in the gray wood by the river is the huntsman and in the brooming corn and in the castellated press of cities. His work lies all wheres and his hounds tire not. I have seen them in a dream, slaverous and wild and their eyes crazed with ravening for souls in this world. Fly them” (471).

At the end of his slumming and vagrancy, just before Suttree abandons Knoxville (for McCarthy is already looking in his rear-view mirror as the author relocates his next five novels to a West Texas setting)—“[B]ehind him the city lay smoking, the sad purlieus of the dead immured with the bones of friends and forebears” (471) —, Suttree, seized by the paroxysms of typhoid fever while in the hospital, dreams the nightmare of his own indictment:

Mr Suttree it is our understanding that at curfew rightly decreed by law and in that hour wherein night draws to its proper close and the new day commences and contrary to conduct befitting a person of your station you betook yourself to various low places within the shire of McAnnally [*anal-ly*, again and again we see the reinforcing metalinguistic play related to the Cloaca Maxima motif] and there did squander several ensuing years in the company of thieves, derelicts, miscreants, pariahs, poltroons, spalpeens, curmudgeons, clotpolls, murderers, gamblers, bawds, whores, trulls, brigands, toppers, tosspots, sots [we can hear the sound of *Sut's*, *sõt-süt*, own named inebriation within this utterance] and archsots, lobcocks, smellsmocks, runagates, rakes, and other assorted and felonious debauchees.

I was drunk, cried Suttree. Seized in a vision of the archetypal patriarch himself unlocking with enormous keys the gates of Hades (457).

As foreshadowed by the passage above, the native English-language reader of *Suttree* is often pressed into service by McCarthy as an intralingual translator<sup>7</sup> who must often re-English the English in order to be able to understand the lexicon of the source language text (SLT): a “poltroon” (origin 1520-30) is a base coward; a “spalpeen” (1770-80) is a rascal or scamp; a “clotpoll” [variant of *clodpoll*, 1595-1605] is a dolt or blockhead; a “trull” (1510-20) is a trollop, strumpet or prostitute; a “toper” (1665-75) is a hard drinker or chronic drunkard; a “tossplot” (1560-70) is a tippler or drunkard; an “archsot,” a McCarthy neologism, is a preeminent drunkard; a “lobcock” is a lob (1325-75), a dull, sluggish person; a “smellsmock” (1425-75) is a lecherous womanizer, esp. an errant clergyman; and a “runagate” (1520-30) is a vagabond or wanderer, as well as a renegade or deserter [which in this context fits with being a derelict, for dereliction refers to deliberate or conscious neglect, one who abandons or deserts from one’s duties, as Suttree has done by forsaking his wife and child: “the derelict that she had taken for the son of light himself was consumed in shame like a torch,” 150].

The challenges for the translator into Portuguese deal not, of course, with the story being told, but with McCarthy’s unique telling of a story that flows and ebbs from the river to the workhouse, to crime scenes of moonlight melonmounters, “small town” eating establishments and country stores, pool halls, drunken barroom

brawls, stinking hospital wards, cheap hotels, edge-of-town brothels, dangerous moonshine stills, and the mysterious, lush forests of the Great Smokies. A prolegomenon for what the translator's profile must include—what the work will entail—in order to bring this novel successfully into Portuguese includes the following representative issues to be resolved: lexicon; anthroponyms, nicknames, and toponyms; ethno-dialectal speech, sociolect and idiolect; discourse register (coarse language, expletives, cussing); epithets and racial slurs; metalanguage (jokes and punning); and narrative style (sentence structure, punctuation, technical discourse and lyricism). McCarthy's translator into Portuguese must compete with the original author to try to match his myriad ways of expressing Cornelius "Bud" Suttree's doings and undoing.

As we have already seen, much of McCarthy's vocabulary in *Suttree* is typically unusual, archaic, foreignizing even to the native language reader within and as English. In *Words Cormac McCarthy Uses in His Novels*, Christopher Forbis, Wesley G. Morgan and John Sepich have documented that McCarthy has used 30,609<sup>8</sup> words in his ten novels: 16,093 words that appear only in one book; 13,384 words that are only used once; and 4,313 words only used twice.<sup>9</sup> There are 4,567 words unique to *Suttree*—e.g., accresced, amaurotic, aneled, bewray, cataphracted, cocklecraft, dockbloom, dubyedee, engrailed, fleerglass, gagestrangled, harridan, hodden, hurdy-gurdy, jacking, kale, lackawanna, livebox, mammyjammers, mawky, mucronate, neap, palliards, pawky, pietins, pokeweed, ratsbane, rifted, runneled, sauger, scobs, scrimshaw, sculling, thersites, tottery, tryopts, uncloven, unshriven, vailing, whelk, wyvern, etc. Also, as is customary with McCarthy's fiction in general, much of *Suttree*'s lexicon consists of coined compound words, which represent a more thorny technical issue to resolve: e.g., ageblackened, aislewise, backoaring, beachwrack, bellycooling, birdhollow, brainpulp, candlewhite, caulkingstring, chimneypots, clawfeet, cleanlipped, coralgrown, etc. ([http://www.johnsepich.com/words\\_unique\\_to\\_suttree.pdf](http://www.johnsepich.com/words_unique_to_suttree.pdf)). The vast and varied vocabulary itself means that the translator will require ample resource materials in both English and Portuguese, imagination, and creative courage (to neologize new

compounds or not?) in order to find the most appropriate localization solutions in Portuguese.

The anthroponyms and nicknames that abound in *Suttree* pose another problem for the translator. What strategy will the translator use, and with what degree of consistency, in dealing with the proper names of characters, bars, stores, and even geographico-administrative units, such as the names of the states of Tennessee and North Carolina (which, for example, in Spanish, a Romance cousin of Portuguese, may become Tenesí and Carolina del Norte)? What to do with nicknames and monickers such as J-Bone, Bearhunter, Worm, moonlight melonmounter, Boneyard, Hoghead, Cabbage, Turdus Musicus, Oceanfrog, Trippin Through the Dew, Gatemouth, Bungalow, Big Frig, Harry the Horse, Jellyroll Kid, Flop, and Smokehouse. In the case of the Spanish translation, a language with similar Romance roots to Portuguese, Luis Murillo Fort<sup>10</sup> opted to retain the original name or nickname in his translation of *Suttree*, resorting to the use of an initial footnote to explicitate for the Spanish-language reader:

Opté por una solución que no me convencía, que era poner una nota al pie la primera vez que aparecía un personaje con un nombre que era un apodo o un mote... Preferí hacer eso que traducirlos o que dejarlos todos tal cual y que nadie se enterara porque, claro, a mí me costó también enterarme de qué querían decir algunos motes y para eso tuve que enviar un e-mail a Gary Fisketjon, el agente de Cormac McCarthy, con una lista de los apodos que yo no sabía cómo traducir o no estaba muy seguro de hasta qué punto eran irónicos, burlones, chistosos, etcétera. Así que, en función de las respuestas que me envió, ‘inventé’ unos apodos en español.<sup>11</sup>

[I opted for a solution that didn't convince me, which was to use a footnote the first time a character appeared with a nickname or moniker... I preferred to do that rather than translate them or leave them as they were, which nobody would understand because, of course, it was also hard for me to understand what some of the nicknames meant. This is why I had to email Gary Fisketjon, Cormac McCarthy's agent, with a list of the nicknames that I didn't know how to translate or about which I wasn't sure to what extent they were ironic, mocking, witty, etc. So, as a result of the answers he sent me, I made up some nicknames in Spanish.]

Will the translator into Portuguese resort to a similar solution by way of occasional footnotes, which break the mimetic effect of the reading,<sup>12</sup> or will the solution be

that of full direct translation, face-value non-translation (which means that the monolingual Portuguese reader will likely “miss the point” of any nickname), or interpolation?

Another challenge is that of not totally translating away ethno-dialectal speech, sociolect and idiolect.<sup>13</sup> The diction of the characters in *Suttree*, ranging from southern-urban educated (Knoxville) to textured substandard Appalachian hillbilly, poses significant problems for the translator into another language because it is exclusively time- and place-bound. Suttree himself comes from a comparably privileged background, one in which literacy and proper speech prevail. Yet he is a young man in the company of roughneck pseudo-peers and a mixed bag of other down-and-outs, those of his predilection and adoption, with whom he shares an identifying group member’s slang or jargon. There is also the diction of the black characters with whom he spends considerable time in the novel, another ethno-dialectal manner of speech that challenges the translator who must by definition commit the betrayal of uprooting *Suttree* from its geographico-lingual element while striving for sameness (similarity of effect) despite the inevitable differences that will accrue. For instance, how to cross-culturally replicate the following in Portuguese:

“I wish ye’d get ye one of these here taters” (12, an old ragpicker’s invitation for Suttree to

dine with him)

“What all’s down there in em?” (23, asked by one of Suttree’s buddies, J-Bone)

“Hell, Worm, this is good whusk” (26, proclaimed by Kenneth Hazelwood, one of Suttree’s

buddies)

“Hidy, he said” (30, a greeting issued by “Country Mouse” Gene Harrogate)

“I allowed ye’d gone under” (87, old man Daddy Watson to Suttree)

“You owes me eighty-five cents” (163, the old black coalpedlar, billing Suttree)

“Bein a nigger is a interesting life” (203, observation made to Suttree by Ab Jones, a black

friend of his)

“You caint do nothing with them crackers. They needs they wigs tightened up ever little bit”

(226, Ab Jones, talking to Suttree)

The issue of discourse register, specifically the use of coarse language, represents another ongoing challenge for the translator of *Suttree*. Clifford Landers reminds us that, when translating such language,

What you cannot do is apply your own standards of decency and morality, or those of any hypothetical audience, to the task. This would be as unjustifiable as ‘improving’ the SL text. Bowdlerization as a common approach to ‘improper’ texts may be a thing of the past, thankfully, but the danger of self-censorship still exists. A prissy or sanctimonious translator, or an unscrupulous one, can totally skew the TL [target language] reader’s perception of a writer; as translators, we do not have that right (151).

Cursing, expletives, invective, and “dirty words” abound in *Suttree*. They serve as markers of idio-socio-dialectal authenticity, the way that Knoxvilleian derelicts, drunkards, thugs and mugs would have expressed themselves in the early 1950s, and the translator into Portuguese will have to be honest while also resorting creatively to adjustments and shifts (from verb to noun, adjective or adverb) in order to provide emotional equivalents (Landers 151) for idiomatic usage of coarse language such as the following: “What are you, a fucking smart-ass?” (37); “What the fuck do you want?” (39); “you squirrely son of a bitch now get the hell away from here” (39); “Fuckin educated pisswillies” (47); “They got me workin with a bunch of crippled fuckers” (47); “You get to fuck around in the afternoon” (47); “I gues they beat the shit out of ye” (47); “Less you get real shitty” (48); “Goddamn” (48); “I sure to shit aint comin back again” (48); “I told them I was done fuckin with em” (49); “You little fistfucker” (52); “hell fire” (54); “You fuckin ay” (57); “Shit a brick” (57); “leave me the son of a bitchin hell alone” (98); “Hey you cocksucker” (103); “Feylovin motherfucker” (167); “Why you shit-ass” (173); “Well fuck it” (177); “We’ve got to get these cunts” (185); “I’ve fucked up my hand” (186); “You’re shittin me” (206);



“Sheeit, he said” (274); “If I don’t get shitfaced drunk” (332); “I don’t want a cupping fuck [fucking cup] of coffee” (336), etc. The reality is that English usage relies idiomatically on a handful of “dirty words”—e.g., damn, goddamn, hell, ass, shit, cunt, fuck—and their variants or compounds to convey many sentiments that have nothing to do with theology or the sexual or scatological definitions of the words themselves. The translator into Portuguese (or into any other language and its cultures) will often have to compensate by translating the emotions and sense-in-situation rather than the actual words which, if rendered literally, will surely lead to an excess of cross-cultural nonsense.<sup>14</sup> For instance, in none of the examples above is McCarthy talking about actual sexual intercourse, fecal matter, or sexual organs. Yet the language, because it is taboo, brings the English-language reader the often private pleasure of engaging in a transgression, which the translator must strive to convey as well. We may spit foul language from our mouths, yet enjoy its spicy aftertaste in proportion to the extent to which it may be inappropriate or forbidden. The translator, therefore, must try not to stray too far from the form and manner of the SLT while at the same time acting upon the realization that a line such as “You fuckin ay” simply means “you are absolutely correct” or “I agree with you.” The translation trick will be to restate this basic meaning in Portuguese with a cultural equivalent of “fuckin ay” that retains some of the verbal taboo characteristics of the English language expression.

The category of epithet and racial slur also presents a difficulty in translating this novel set in the lexico-historical American south. “Nigger,” an execrable taboo word that in the United States has been euphemized as the “n” word in recent years, appears often in *Suttree*, true to the novel’s reflection of a particular era and socio-cultural milieu: “What say, Nigger” (24); “Get ye a drink, Nig” (24); “Boys, I’ve fought some bad whiskey but I’m a dirty nigger” (24); “you don’t have to do nothin to stir up a bunch of old crazy niggers” (109); “He aint interested in them nigger gals” (112); “They’s niggers lives there” (114); “Niggers, he said. Shit, they’ll buy anything” (117); “Suttree crossed through the markethouse and went on toward niggertown with his fish” (220); “he turned black in the face as a nigger” (257);

“Somebody’ll kill that nigger one of these days” (266); “That old nigger witch” (278); “I think I called him a nigger cocksucker” (393), etc. The use of the word and some of its variants is textured. Often, in the dialogue-sociolect of the various characters in the novel, it simply denotes a “black person,” a person of African descent,<sup>15</sup> but it is also frequently loaded with the intentional pejorative connotations that stem from white racism. Yet it can also be a nickname, as in the capitalized “Nigger,” which conveys a slight elevation in status through the word’s function as a title, or “Nig,” the latter of which implies a certain camaraderie and intimacy among drinking buddies. Lexical counterpoints to the derogatory “nigger” can be found in the descriptive sections of the narrative: e.g., “the negro meetinghouse” (21), “when the man reappeared he had a young black with him” (36), “an old black came through with his zinc sandwichtray” (148). The translator into Portuguese will have to make similar distinctions for a new and different readership while anchoring them to a cultural setting and time in the American South.

A consideration of the thorny issue of racial slurs from its opposite directionality, translation from Portuguese into English, may shed some procedural light on the scrupulousness to be exercised in the matter. Translator Gregory Rabassa, who works from Spanish and Portuguese into English, explains that:

Racial terms and slurs are particularly hard to handle in Latin America because of the welter of distinctions made and the accompanying slurs. The Spanish word *negro*, black, passed into English as a description of race, Negro, which was first capitalized and then done away with. Actually, sticking with the translation ‘black’ seems to have worked out. African Venezuelan as in African American would be an absurdity (. . .) Getting back to racial slurs and epithets, there is no linguistic equivalent in Spanish for ‘nigger.’ It’s all done with adjectives and additives. When you hear *negro cabrón* or *negrito* applied to a grown man you should know that you have just heard ‘nigger.’ There is little else to do but translate it that way (165).

And experienced translator Clifford Landers writes that:

On the subject of correspondence, I have seen translations that render the simple Portuguese word *negro*, which in itself carries no racist overtones in Brazilian usage, into the n-word. Had the author

intended to use a pejorative racial term, there is no shortage of verbal resources in Portuguese... This is inexcusable and, yes, dishonest if it makes the author appear as prejudiced (152).

The word “nigger” is emblematic of the shameful historical burden of slavery in the United States, particularly in the American south. In translating its use in *Suttree* into Portuguese, the translator will have to answer the following question: How can the depth of this word, which reflects history and culture in a particular setting, be most appropriately conveyed in other words for other readers from other cultures, such that they read in Portuguese while understanding something perhaps shared to some extent yet historically unique to the United States?

Humor—metalinguistic joking and punning—will pose yet another area of difficulty for the translator of *Suttree* into Portuguese. When Gene Harrogate asks an old ragpicker if he knows the “difference between a grocery store fly and a hardware store fly,” he answers his own prankishness by explaining that “the grocery store fly lights on the beans and peas, and the hardware store lights on the nails and screws” (98). The homonymic play on words, of course, is that of the homophonic “peas” and “pees” (urinates) and the double entendre of “screws” as both “a metal fastener having a tapered shank with a helical thread, and topped with a slotted head, driven into wood or the like by rotating, esp. by means of a screwdriver” and as slang for an “act of coitus” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/screw>). In another example, “Buddy” Suttree asks his Aunt Martha about the name of a dog in a family album: “I disremember, she said. They had one one time named John L Sullivan cause it was the fightinest little thing you ever seen.” Buddy rejoins that, “We had one named Jose Iturbi. Because it was the peeinest dog” (128). Here the homophonic joke, “pianist” and “peeing-est” (the dog that pees the most) is at the expense of the Spanish conductor and pianist who appeared in several Hollywood films in the 1940s. And, later in the novel, Suttree is interrogated by Willard, Wanda’s younger brother: “You got a girl? No. I used to have one but I forgot where I laid her. The boy looked at him dully for a minute and then slapped his knee and guffawed. Boy, he said, that’s a good’n”

(322). Again, the double entendre of “laid” as having put or placed something in a particular position versus having had sexual intercourse. Given that homonyms and homophones are unique to the different languages in which they occur, the translator into Portuguese will have to stretch to find or create equivalent-effect word play, or the novel in Portuguese will require amplification and explicitation via interpolation or footnotes, which again interrupt the mimetic contract. A joke that has to be explained seldom remains a joke.

Finally, for our preliminary sketch of a translator’s profile, issues of style—ranging from technical discourse, sentence structure, punctuation, and lyrical prose, among others—will also challenge the translator’s resourcefulness. For example, in order to translate the opening scene, a knowledge of river fishing and its paraphernalia will be required:

Below the bridge he eased himself erect, took up the oars and began to row toward the south bank. There he brought the skiff about, swinging the stern into a clump of willows, and going aft he raised up a heavy cord that ran into the water from an iron pipe driven into the mud of the bank. This he relayed again through an open oarlock mounted on the skiff’s transom. Now he set out again, rowing slowly, the cord coming up wet and smooth through the lock and dipping into the river again. When he was some thirty feet from shore the first dropper came up, doubling the line until he reached and cast it off. He went on, the skiff lightly quartered against the river’s drift, the hooks riding up one by one into the oarlock... (7).

*Suttree* is characterized by a distinctively complex McCarthian sentence structure and punctuation, specifically the use of a complete sentence often followed by phrases that would normally be either subordinate clauses, offset by commas and other punctuation (which McCarthy eschews), or other complete sentences. The translator should strive to respect the style of the SLT by resisting the pull of conventional “correct” expression in the TL, which would lead to a misrepresentative restructuring and re-punctuating of passages such as the following:

Suttree would see her in the street, dawn hours before the world’s about. A hookbacked crone going darkly and bent in a shapeless frock of sacking dyed dead black with logwood chips and fustic mordant. Her spider hands clutching up a shawl of morling lamb. Gimpen

granddam hobbling through the gloom with your knobbly cane go by,  
go by. Over the bridge in the last hours of night to gather herbs from  
the bluff on the river's south shore. (278)

And while the novel is a harrowing, tragi-comic trip through the human Cloaca Maxima of Knoxville in the early 1950s, McCarthy's prose remains characteristically lyrical and suggestive, from the opening lines of the epistle to his reader—"Dear friend... We are come to a world within the world. In these alien reaches, these maugre sinks and interstitial wastes that the righteous see from carriage and car another life dreams. Illshapen or black and deranged, fugitive of all order, strangers in everyland" (3-4)—to the image of our huntsman, with which the novel closes: "His work lies all wheres and his hounds tire not. I have seen them in a dream, slaverous and wild and their eyes crazed with ravening for souls in this world. Fly them" (471).

The goal of the translation—always a "doublegoer, some othersuttree" (287)—into Portuguese or any other language should be to preserve as much as possible that which makes Cormac McCarthy so distinctive in his original English, to minimize translating away his uniquely constitutive characteristics while necessarily having to transform so much about his writing as he is reworded and restructured in a different, foreign and alienating language. The noble act of literary translation, for all of its potential splendor<sup>16</sup>, never ceases to be a carefully calculated exercise in damage control. In dealing with McCarthy, what is required is a translatorial poetics of disruption of convention—"a willful disturbance and destabilization"<sup>17</sup>—, through which the translation should seek to do to its own language what McCarthy does in and to the English language. In looking ahead to a belated but most welcome addition of *Suttree* to Cormac McCarthy's novels available in Portuguese, prolegomena such as this may serve also to provide a framework for outcomes evaluation.

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Rabassa, Gregory. *If This Be Treason*. New York: New Directions, 2005.

<sup>1</sup> While such a translation may possibly be in progress at this writing, a 5/15/08 online search at sites such as [www.livrariacultura.com.br](http://www.livrariacultura.com.br) and [www.saraiva.com.br](http://www.saraiva.com.br) confirms that as of this date the novel has not yet been translated into Portuguese.

<sup>2</sup> Out of more than 6,000 languages worldwide, estimates rank Portuguese, with 250+ million speakers, as the sixth most spoken language ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portuguese_language), <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/language-centre/Self-Access-Centre/portuguese/>, <http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20070625043717AA8BNAe>).

<sup>3</sup> Also in need of translation into Portuguese is McCarthy's excellent second novel *Outer Dark*, a complexly worded and woven narrative set in Appalachian East Tennessee, the setting of his first four novels.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cormacmccarthy.com/works/Default.htm>. The Official Web Site of the Cormac McCarthy Society (<http://www.cormacmccarthy.com/>) is an excellent source of information about the author. It includes the following sections: Works, Biography, Resources, Forum, Journal, Conferences, Bookshop, along with information about the Society itself, whose "stated purpose is 'to further the scholarship and general appreciation of Cormac McCarthy's writing and to facilitate the gathering of scholars and enthusiastic lay readers alike who share a common interest in Cormac McCarthy and his work.'"

<sup>5</sup> East Tennessee Appalachia is the setting of his first four novels: *The Orchard Keeper*, *Outer Dark*, *Child of God* and *Suttree*. With this fifth novel, *Blood Meridian*, McCarthy relocates his novels to the West Texas-Mexico border areas.

<sup>6</sup> (<http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio?isbn=0679736328>)

<sup>7</sup> In his seminal essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," Russian linguist Roman Jakobson identifies the first of "three ways of interpreting a verbal sign" as "intralingual translation or *rewording* (. . .) an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language" (145).

<sup>8</sup> This is a remarkable number, similar to that of Shakespeare: "In his complete works, Shakespeare used 31,534 *different* words." The average native speaker of English, depending upon the level of education, uses between 12,000 and 20,000 words, which explains one aspect of why McCarthy is a

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challenging read (<http://www-math.cudenver.edu/~wbriggs/gr/shakespeare.html> and [http://englishenglish.com/english\\_facts\\_12.htm](http://englishenglish.com/english_facts_12.htm), visited 5/16/08).

<sup>9</sup> ([http://www.johnsepich.com/words\\_cormac\\_mccarthy\\_uses\\_in\\_his\\_novels.pdf](http://www.johnsepich.com/words_cormac_mccarthy_uses_in_his_novels.pdf), viewed 5/15/08).

<sup>10</sup> Luis Murillo Fort, an accomplished translator of many American prose writers, has translated seven of McCarthy's ten novels into Spanish. Having worked so intensely with McCarthy's fiction, what he has to say about translating McCarthy work should be of interest.

<sup>11</sup> From a 3/26/08 interview with this accomplished translator into Spanish, manuscript currently in preparation, titled "Pedagogía traductológica trasatlántica: Una entrevista con Luis Murillo Fort, traductor de Cormac McCarthy."

<sup>12</sup> Clifford Landers, an accomplished critic, translation theorist, and translator of Brazilian fiction into English, reminds us in his very useful *Literary Translation: A Practical Guide*, that:

[t]he greater the cultural difference between the source culture and the target culture, the more the translator will need to bridge that gap... Any wide gap between the SL [source language] and the TL [target language] cultures will introduce the problem of whether to attempt to provide sufficient background to approximate the SL reader's response to that word or phrase. There are only three basic ways to cope with the lacunae in the TL reader's knowledge of the SL culture: footnotes, interpolations, and omission... In the absence of footnotes in the original, the translation that includes them is a warped reflection. Why? Because they destroy the *mimetic* effect, the attempt by (most) fiction writers to create the illusion that the reader is actually witnessing, if not experiencing, the events described. Footnotes break the flow, disturbing the continuity by drawing the eye, albeit briefly, away from the text to a piece of information that, however useful, is still a disrupter of the 'willing suspension of disbelief' " (93).

<sup>13</sup> For more on this aspect of translating McCarthy into Spanish, see Doyle, "A whole new style seemed to be seeking expression here": Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* in Spanish." *Translation Review* 72 (2007): 9-25.

<sup>14</sup> For example, in American English "hot shit" and "cool shit" can both mean, figuratively speaking, "good shit" (or even "great shit," which may also be communicated via "bad shit," where "bad" actually means "good" or "great," as in speaking about the quality of drugs: "This is some really bad shit"). But one cannot use the word "shit," "merda" in Portuguese, to convey similarly a sense of something being *good* or well done by saying "merda quente," "merda fresca," "boa merda," "grande merda," or "má merda."

<sup>15</sup> In his masterpiece *Blood Meridian*, which critic Harold Bloom has called "clearly the major esthetic achievement of any living American writer" (*The New York Observer*, from the jacket of the novel), the word "nigger" is used in its broader definitional sense to mean "a member of any dark-skinned people; a person of any race or origin regarded as contemptible, inferior, ignorant, etc.; a person who is economically, politically, or socially disenfranchised." Thus, it is used by the white, Anglo Glanton conscripts to refer to Negroes, Indians and Mexicans—blacks, reds and browns: e.g., "They was passable masons, I'd say that [in reference to the Anassasi ruins]. These niggers [Indians in the desert southwest 1840s] hereabouts now aint no kind" (142) and "You aint goin to like them niggers a bit more than me" (210), the character Tate speaking in reference to "a party of armed Sonoran cavalry [Mexicans] on the plains west of Baviácora.



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<sup>16</sup> In his seminal (you have used seminal in note 6) essay, “The Misery and Splendor of Translation,” Spanish thinker Jose Ortega y Gasset reminds us that “To declare its impossibility is not an argument against the possible splendor of the translator’s task.” The possible splendor will fall to the “good utopian” who “promises himself to be, primarily, an inexorable realist. Only when he is certain of not having acceded to the least illusion, thus having gained the total view of a reality stripped stark naked, may he, fully arrayed, turn against that reality and strive to reform it, yet acknowledging the impossibility of the task, which is the only sensible approach” (99).

<sup>17</sup> See Doyle, “An Interview with Luis Murillo Fort: A Translator's Translator in Barcelona .” *Translation Review* 73 (2007): 3-13.