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THE GHOST OF A CHANCE?
THINKING COLOURS ACROSS LANGUAGES
AND CULTURES

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ABSTRACT

In 1810, Johann Wolfgang Goethe suggested in Zur Farbenlehre that colour is a phenomenon difficult to categorise, resulting as it does from physiology, physics and perception. The fact that colour seems to be experiential to a large extent posits an interesting (and challenging) problem to literary works focussing on it. In this article, I argue that this issue is translational in nature and takes shape at two levels: first, at the level of its representation in literary works — how does one translate a visual experience into words? —, and secondly at the level of its re-representation in translated literary works — how does one translate what is essentially an already-translated visual experience? Whenever colour is semantically and morphologically constitutive of meaning in literature, untranslatability haunts the text. However, publishers and translators rarely shrink from the task of translating on this account. This stake against probability is well worth looking into, as it may uncover a wealth of creativity and a resistance to the understanding of art as solipsism. In this article, Paul Auster's 'Ghosts', part of his New York Trilogy, will be read as a text suggesting a culture-bound hermeneutics of colour, and as such probably untranslatable. I discuss the possible paradox of this degree of untranslatability against the text's actual 'translatedness' by examining the two existing translations into European Portuguese.

Keywords: Colours. (Un)Translatability. Language diversity. Literary culture.

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RESUMO

Em 1810, Johann Wolfgang Goethe sugeria, em Zur Farbenlehre, que a cor é um fenômeno de difícil classificação por resultar da fisiologia, da física e da perceção. O facto de a cor parecer ser, em grande medida, experiencial coloca um problema interessante (e desafiador) quando estamos perante uma obra literária que se centra nela. Neste artigo, defendo que a questão é, por natureza, translacional e pode tomar forma a dois níveis: primeiro, ao nível da representação na obra literária – como se traduz uma experiência visual em palavras? – e, segundo, ao nível da sua re-representação em tradução – como se traduz o que é essencialmente uma experiência visual que por si só já é tradução? Sugiro que, sempre que a cor é constitutiva, semântica e/ou morfologicamente, do sentido em literatura, o texto é habitado por um grau da intraduzibilidade. O desafio que a cor coloca às leis da probabilidade translatória merece estudo, porquanto pode pôr a descoberto um manancial de criatividade e resistência ao entendimento solipsista de arte. Neste artigo, lerei 'Ghosts' de Paul Auster, narrativa que integra A Trilogia de Nova Iorque, como um texto que sugere uma hermenêutica da cor enraizada na cultura – ora, isto torna a narrativa parcialmente intraduzível a um nível fundamental. Assim, discutirei o paradoxo que esta intraduzibilidade fundamental constitui perante a tradução real da obra no contexto das duas traduções existentes em português europeu.

__Palavras-chave:__ Cor. (In)Traduzibilidade. Diversidade linguística. Cultura literária.

AVANT PROPOS. A BRIEF NOTE ON THE PURPOSES OF THE ARTICLE.

> [A]ll naming is itself a story.
> (Brooke-Rose, 1991, p. 23)

In the following article, I will try to make a case for translation both as an analytical concept to read literature and an age-long practice. Translation will be first discussed as a way of interpreting a narrative: Paul Auster's 'Ghosts', a text first published in 1986. Because the narrative implies, at its core, a translational gesture – with characters bearing the names of colours in an intricate scheme that exacts full participation on the reader's part –, I propose to read it as an allegory of the translational act.

In a second, but complementary, movement, I will focus on how this use of colour as an interpretive key renders translations into European Portuguese a challenge inasmuch as colours (a) are played with on a morphological and semantical level, and (b) are constitutive of idioms and a particular worldview.

This is not – does *not* purport to be – an effort in translation description, rather the following considerations suggest translation and translatability may be deployed as conceptual and analytical

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tools when discussing literature, and does so in the wake of what came to be known as the 'translational turn' in the humanities and social sciences.[2]

COLOURS, THEORIES & A READING OF 'GHOSTS' – JUDGING THE IMPOSSIBLE.

> *And so here we are, many of us, authors, critics, teachers (criticus, which goes back to krinein, to judge; to kritikos, capable of judging, deciding: kriteon from krino, to separate, sort out, distinguish, judge - but also to interpret dreams - go, fait rever), writing on the impossibility of writing, sorting out diverse writings on the impossibility of writing, distinguishing them, interpreting their non-interpretability, we are the judges of the impossible.*
> (Brooke-Rose, 1991, p. 166)

'Die Erfahrung lehrt uns, daß die einzelnen Farben besondre Gemütsstimmungen geben' ('experience teaches us that the individual colours offer particular dispositions') — Johann Wolfgang Goethe's famous assertion in 1810 points to a prevailing understanding of colour as a phenomenon difficult to categorise neatly, resulting as it does from physics, physiology and perception. Consequently, it thrives in connotation and potentiality, as much as actuality and denotation. In everyday language, idioms are evidence that colour is to a large extent experiential and culture-bound. In the words of Umberto Eco, 'when one utters a colour term one is not directly pointing to a state of the world, but is rather connecting or correlating that term with a cultural unit, a concept due to a given segmentation of the chromatic continuum' (Eco, 2003, p. 186).

The fact that colours are organised differently across space and time posits an interesting (and challenging) problem to reading and rewriting literary works focussing on colour. For, as Eco further argues: 'To think that colour terms are simply denoting differences suggested by the visible spectrum is like thinking that genealogical relationships presuppose a unique kinship structure which is the same for every culture. Instead, in colours as in parenthood, terms are defined by their oppositions to and differences from other terms, and all of them are defined by a system' (Eco, 2003, p. 185). One further complication results, as Guy Deutscher (2010) has suggested, from the imbrication of language and colour perception, as 'the concepts of color in a language and the habit of differentiating between them contribute to the stored memories that the brain draws on when generating the sensation of color' (Deutscher, 2010, p. 249).

In the following considerations, I will argue that this problem is translational in nature and takes shape at two levels: first, at the level of its representation in literary works — how does one translate a visual experience into words? —, and secondly at the level of its re-representation in translated literary texts — how does one translate what is essentially an already-translated visual experience? Answering the first-level question results from an understanding of interpretation as an act of translation. Interpretation as translation inhabits every creative human action, as both writing and rewriting are rooted in acts of comprehension: 'We continually emit a welter of signs and signals in response to a bombardment of signs and signals we receive from outside ourselves. In this sense we might even rephrase Descartes by saying, 'We interpret, therefore we are' (Iser, 2000, p. 1). I am interested in discussing how a degree of translatedness inhabits Auster's 'Ghosts'

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[2] The present article is indebted to the discussion promoted by the diverse work of scholars such as Susan Bassnett (1998), Emily Apter (2006, 2013) and Doris Bachmann-Medick (2008).

and is, arguably, already part of the possibility of reading the text: '[I]f interpretation has to cope with the liminal space resulting from something being translated into something else, then interpretation is primarily a performative act rather than an explanatory one' (Iser, 2000, p. 17).

Following Iser's assumptions on the interpretive act as translation, I suggest that performing interpretation may presuppose (be haunted by) a degree of untranslatability which results from the very liminality Iser refers to: '[T]he liminal space highlights a residual untranslatability, which gives rise to a growing complexity of the procedures operative in interpretation' (Iser, 2000, p.114). This leads me to the second-level issue: that of re-translating into other languages the impact of colour on the textual fabric. Whenever colour is semantically and morphologically constitutive of meaning in literature, the ghost of untranslatability, I argue, haunts the text – while not untranslatable *per se*, expressions such as 'blue movies' or 'to be blue' become a challenge to translation when colour has to be preserved because it is a constitutive part of meaning formation. This calls for a culture-bound hermeneutics of colour, which may have to presuppose a degree of untranslatability.[3]

From now on, my arguments will be presented in the form of a series of refractions, as the concept of 'refraction' seems both apt and agile, as it may apply (a) to both writing and rewriting as interpretation, and (b) to interpretation as translation. Furthermore, the concept plays, of course, with the physicality of colour, but points as well to the unfinished and open character of these notes and, most importantly, it engages with André Lefevere's early term for rewriting.

> A writer's work gains exposure and achieves influence mainly through 'misunderstanding and misconceptions,' or to use a more neutral term, refractions. Writers and their work are always understood and conceived against a certain background or, if you will, are refracted through a certain spectrum, just as their work itself can refract previous works through a certain spectrum (Lefevere, 2000 [1982], p. 234).

As it will be clear, I hope, the concept of 'refraction' traverses the major points of the following considerations.

REFRACTION 1. TRANSGRESSING TRADITION — WRITING AS (SUB)VERSION

'Yes, it could be one thing, he tells himself. But it could also be another' (Auster, 1990a, p. 183). The last two sentences describe *in nuce* the text I will be discussing here, as undecidability

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[3] The concept of 'untranslatability' is viewed with suspicion in some quarters in Translation Studies, as scholars seem at times too keen to do away with untranslatability, claiming that nothing is untranslatable. While this may be true on a purely semantic level, as concepts may be explained and translated into 'some further, alternative sign, especially a sign "in which it is more fully developed," as Peirce, the deepest inquirer into the essence of signs, insistently stated' (Jakobson, 2000, p. 114), the fact remains that translating literature is a much more complex undertaking than just translating random words, and is certainly different from explaining signs linguistically. In fact, Jakobson concludes his reflection in the article 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation' by acknowledging untranslatability: 'The pun, or to use a more erudite, and perhaps more precise term—paronomasia, reigns over poetic art, and whether its rule is absolute or limited, poetry by definition is untranslatable. Only creative transposition is possible: either intralingual transposition—from one poetic shape into another, or interlingual transposition—from one language into another, or finally intersemiotic transposition—from one system of signs into another, e.g., from verbal art into music, dance, cinema, or painting' (Jakobson, 2000, p. 118). The concept has gained (controversial) momentum in the wake of the publication in 2004 of Barbara Cassin's *Le Vocabulaire européen des philosophies. Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*. The dictionary purports to be an act of resistance against Globish.

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lies at the heart of Paul Auster's text entitled 'Ghosts'. Part of *The New York Trilogy*, the narrative takes, like the other two 'instalments' of the trilogy ('City of Glass' and 'The Locked Room'), the overdetermined form of the detective novel only to subvert it subsequently. As William G. Little reminds us, 'the traditional detective novel is governed by a totalizing imperative; it invariably presumes a structure and a case in which nothing goes to waste since everything turns out to conform to a central, organizing logos or author-itative cause' (Little, 1997, p. 136). In providing closure in form of answers to previous problems, conventional detective novels cater for the human need for intelligibility, grounded as this is on the possibility of meaning. Thus, and in spite of the violence, the traditional detective novel is a rather hopeful subgenre, as it tends to reassure the reader of the final monosemy of what appeared ambiguous and uncertain throughout the text – in the end, the enigma (the whodunnit) is solved and order is restored.

At first 'Ghosts' resonates with the expectations of a "whodunnit". On the first page, one reads: 'The case seems simple enough. White wants Blue to follow a man named Black and to keep an eye on him for as long as necessary. While working for Brown, Blue did many tail jobs, and this one seems no different…' (Auster, 1990a, p. 161). Everything is as it is supposed to be, and yet the names of the characters introduce, right from the beginning, an element of discomfort, as Blue, White, Brown and Black seem improbable names, particularly when taken together and referred to in such rapid succession. The text seems to be forcing the reader to realise early on that colours constitute a signifcant apparatus of producing meaning, with every character named after a colour, and Black and Blue living on Orange Street. The disquiet is further enhanced by the absence of convincing physical descriptions, a common trait in detective novels. One example must suffice here. Often described as a shadow (Auster, 1990a, pp. 168, 171, 198), the only description the reader has of Black is the following: 'Blue estimates Black's age to be the same as his, give or take a year or two. That is to say, somewhere in his late twenties or early thirties. He finds Black's face pleasant enough, with nothing to distinguish it from a thousand other faces one sees every day' (Auster, 1990a, pp. 165-166). Colours become, therefore, the only reliable descriptive tool.

Soon the reader begins to 'find it all a bit strange' (Auster, 1990a). For, whereas the language and the novel structure — someone is paid to follow someone else — comply with the American tradition of the detective story, the text keeps opening up to new layers of uncertainty where 'words, instead of drawing out facts and making them sit palpably in the world, have induced them to disappear' (Auster, 1990a, p. 75). Gradually expectations get frustrated, as nothing appears to be what it seems and the security of the subgenre gives way to a form of subversion where speculation rhymes with a form of refraction of the self: 'To speculate, from the Latin speculatus, meaning to spy out, to observe, and linked to the word speculum, meaning mirror or looking glass. For in spying out at Black across the street, it is as though Blue were looking into a mirror, and instead of merely watching another, he finds he is also watching himself' (Auster, 1990a, pp. 171-172). The private eye becomes a private I, as the detective finds himself entangled in a quest for identity: 'I'm changing, he says to himself. Little by little, I'm no longer the same' (Auster, 1990a, pp. 173-174). This metamorphosis also implies an inquiry into the nature of authorship and authority, as the novel becomes the site of a parodical self-reflectiveness:

> He [Blue] feels like a man who has been condemned to sit in a room and go on reading a book for the rest of his life. This is strange enough—to be only half alive at best, seeing the world only through words, living only through the lives of others. […] That's all that there is, Blue realizes, and he no longer wants any

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part of it. But how to get out? How to get out of the room that is the book that will go on being written for as long as he stays in the room? (Auster, 1990a, pp. 201-202).

As the characters seem aware of their papery existence, 'Ghosts' moves on to question ironically the very possibility of narrating. As William G. Little puts it, '[w]riter and detective close the book (on a case) by silencing the synchronic and diachronic play of difference(s) that make(s) signification possible' (Little, 1997, p. 137). Thus, I argue, the text uses the structure of a traditionally stable subgenre to test and discuss the possibility of meaning, potentially thwarting the reader's expectations. As mentioned above, colours play a pivotal part, as they promote the disembodiment of the characters and help turning them into ghosts. This 'ghostliness' plays an important role in the poetics of the author, as I will try to show next.

REFRACTION 2. IN SEARCH OF AUTHORSHIP — WRITING AS TRANSLATION

'As the days go on, Blue realizes there is no end to the stories he can tell' (Auster, 1990, p. 173). In a very significant way, 'Ghosts' can be said to be a story about stories about stories in an endless search for authority and authorship, with colours highlighting the assumption that everything is perception. That 'Ghosts' is no conventional detective story is hardly controversial, as nothing much seems to happen in the novel. As colours, characters in 'Ghosts' are abstractions, refractions of the possibility of narrating. Ghosts. Or, as Roland Barthes called them, 'paper beings' who, in order to exist, need other eyes looking at them (Barthes, 1975, p. 261).

Apart from the occasional walk, Black, the man followed (is he?), seems to do nothing except to read, write and stare. As Black himself puts it: 'Writing is a solitary business. It takes over your life. In some sense, a writer has no life of his own. Even when he's there, he's not really there'. To this Blue replies: 'Another ghost', and Black agrees: 'Exactly' (Auster, 1990a, p. 209). *The New York Trilogy* has been read as literature on literature and / or literary theory, and it would not be difficult to read 'Ghosts' in particular as a parody of narrative models: Black as a figuration of an empirical author who creates an implied author — White — who commissions a narrator, Blue. However, I would like to propose here a different reading of the narrative. I suggest that the novel can be read as an allegory of the elusiveness of meaning in the process of translating with Black assuming the role of the autor and Blue that of the translator.

Even though there is much in the novel to support this interpretation, I will begin by referring to a passage in *The Invention of Solitude*, arguably the early Auster text that best defines the poetics according to the author. In Book Nine of Book of Memory, the third-person narrator reflects on the activity of translating, describing it as an experience of entering another person's solitude:

> Even though there is only one man in the room, there are two. A. imagines himself as a kind of ghost of that other man, who is both there and not there, and whose book is both the same and not the same as the one he is translating. Therefore, he tells himself, it is possible to be alone and not alone at the same moment (Auster, 1988, p. 136).

This resonates in 'Ghosts' when Blue suggests that '[e]very man has his double somewhere' (Auster, 1990a, p. 205). Trying to make sense of Black, who 'is no more than a blankness, a hole in the texture of things' (Auster, 1990a, p. 173), Blue is indeed attempting to translate him. As a detective-cum-translator, Blue is at first described as a man used to 'stick to outward facts, descri-

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bing events as though each word tallied exactly with the thing described', therefore '[w]ords are transparent for him, great windows that stand between him and the world, and until now they have never impeded his view, have never even seemed to be there' (Auster, 1990a, p. 174). Gradually, however, Blue 'evolves into the character he wants to play' (Auster, 1990a, p. 213) – that of the author. With this comes the realisation that '[t]o enter Black […] was the equivalent of entering himself, and once inside himself, he can no longer conceive of being anywhere else' (Auster, 1990a, p. 223). Thus, the novel might be read as the slow discovery of the volatility of roles and of meaning in translation. The struggle is obvious in the following passage that, in a way, reverses the Adamic gesture:

> He says to himself: what happened is not really what happened. For the first time in his experience of writing reports, he discovers that words do not necessarily work, that it is possible for them to obscure the things they are trying to say. Blue looks around the room and fixes his attention on various objects, one after the other. He sees the lamp and says to himself, lamp. He sees the bed and says to himself, bed. He sees the notebook and says to himself, notebook. I will not call the lamp a bed, he thinks, or the bed a lamp. No, these words fit snugly around the things they stand for, and the moment Blue speaks them, he feels a deep satisfaction, as though he has just proved the existence of the world. Then he looks out across the street and sees Black's window. It is dark now, and Black is asleep. That's the problem, Blue says to himself, trying to find a little courage. That and nothing else. He's there, but it's impossible to see him. And even when I do see him it's as though the lights are out (Auster, 1990a, p. 176).

Read as a performance of the translating act, 'Ghosts' proposes a view of translation as a double act: on the one hand, Blue has to slowly learn to be fully in accord with Black, so much so that he *becomes* Black; on the other, to be Black, the author, Blue, the translator, has to symbolically kill him, so that he can take his place. Once he does, Blue disappears in the text, and the narrative comes to an end: 'For now is the moment that Blue stands up from his chair, puts on his hat, and walks through the door. And from this moment on, we know nothing' (Auster, 1990a, p. 232). As we shall see next, this translational metamorphosis is rendered most visible in the creative use of colours.

REFRACTION 3. UNITED COLOURS OF TRANSLATION

'Translators must negotiate with the ghost of a distant author, with the disturbing presence of a foreign text, with the phantom of the reader they are translating for' (Eco, 2003, p. 173). Ghosts are indeed all around us.

It has been suggested throughout this article that colours are of paramount importance in the morphology of 'Ghosts'. Not only are all characters and most places named after colours, colours are also often the sole means of character description available to the reader. This, of course, may render the text partially untranslatable, as '[t]he way of distinguishing, segmenting, organising colours varies from culture to culture' (Eco, 2003, p. 185). As a name, Blue resonates in English-speaking geographies quite differently than the highly improbable Azul will in Portuguese, not to mention Blau in German, for instance. (While Black, White, and Green are common family names

in English, thus suggesting that the use of colours as names is at the same time ordinary and odd,[4] the only common colour-related family names in Portuguese is Branco [white] and Castanho [brown], all others are slightly odd-sounding, even if Verde and Preto do exist.)

I shall now briefly reflect on how colours contribute to the economy of the narrative, as they can be said to work as a kind of short-hand writing, creating meaning out of the possibilities generated within the English language and an English-speaking culture. Examples of this abound, but I will focus on two. First, the considerations on colour and its meaning are globally untranslatable as such, as the text plays with the connotations of blue, black and white in English, as well as with idioms and names in the English language.

> And then, as his [Blue's] eyes grow heavy and sleep begins to wash over him, he thinks how strange it is that everything has its own color. Everything we see, everything we touch—everything in the world has its own color. Struggling to stay awake a little longer, he begins to make a list. Take blue for example, he says. There are bluebirds and blue jays and blue herons. There are cornflowers and periwinkles. There is noon over New York. There are blueberries, huckleberries, and the Pacific Ocean. There are blue devils and blue ribbons and blue bloods. There is a voice singing the blues. There is my father's police uniform. There are blue laws and blue movies. There are my eyes and my name. He pauses, suddenly at a loss for more blue things, and then moves on to white (Auster, 1990a, p. 217).

There are two translations of 'Ghosts' into European Portuguese: one by Luzia Maria Martins published in 1990 and another by Alberto Gomes in 1999. Faced with the 'colour problem', Martins opts to translate the proper names into Portuguese, whereas Gomes decides to keep them in English probably on the face of the improbability of having characters named Azul or Laranja in Portuguese. Neither strategy does full justice to the problem present in the passage quoted above. The translations below become to some extent ungraspable, as (a) 'blue' either disappears from most of the references or its appearance is forced, unlike what happens in English, and (b) there are no 'blue devils' or 'blue laws' or 'blue movies' in European Portuguese, and the references have thus to be explained in a footnote. Naturally the word play becomes anemic when explained. Furthermore, common words such as 'blueberries' become much more enigmatic in their Portuguese rendering ('vacínios'). In a nutshell: despite the translators' best efforts, the text remains irreducible because Portuguese does not 'embody' colours in the same way English language does.

TRANSLATION 1.

> Lutando contra o sono para ficar acordado mais algum tempo, começa a fazer uma lista: «Pensemos no azul, por exemplo», diz ele. «Há os azulões, os gaios-azuis, as graças-azuis. Há as centáureas e as congossas. Há uma lua sobre Nova Iorque. Há os vacínios e os mirtilos, e há o oceano Pacífico. Há demónios azuis, fitas azuis e sangues azuis. Há vozes que cantam os blues. Há o uniforme de polícia do meu pai. Há leis azuis e filmes azuis. Há os meus olhos e o meu

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4   It is common that people have names related to colours, although Orange is probably a bit far-fetched. However, the fact that *all* characters are named after colours strikes the reader as strikingly odd.

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nome.» Pára, subitamente, impossibilitado de se lembrar de mais coisas azuis, e depois passa para o branco (Auster, 1990b, p. 218).

TRANSLATION 2.

> Luta por permanecer acordado um pouco mais e começa a fazer uma lista. Azul, por exemplo, diz. Os estorninos-azuis, os gaios-azuis e as garças-azuis. As centáureas e as congossas. O meio-dia sobre Nova Iorque. Os rododendros e os mirtilos, e o oceano Pacífico. Melancolia, fitas azuis e sangues azuis. A voz que canta blues. O uniforme de polícia do meu pai. As blue laws e os blue movies. Os meus olhos e o meu nome. Pára subitamente, desolado por não se lembrar de mais coisas azuis, e depois passa para o branco (Auster, 1999, p. 185).

Despite going about it differently, both translators finally opt out to translate just the sense, thereby disregarding – *having to* disregard – the constitutive effect that colours have in the meaning of the English text.

The next bipartite example is even more interesting because its untranslatability lies at a more fundamental level. It is not that the phrases are difficult to translate — they are not —, the problem lies in the fact that they cannot be translated with recourse to colours, and for this reason any Portuguese version must erase colour morphologically and syntactically, thus effectively precluding the formation of possible layers of meaning.

> *1.*
> Then, out of the blue, he [Blue] begins to consider another possibility (Auster, 1990a, p. 221).

> *2.*
> He [Blue] takes one more step into the room and then blacks out, collapsing to the floor like a dead man (Auster, 1990a, p. 223).

These are but two examples of a frequent strategy in the novel: translators have to decide between meaning and morphology, even though morphology is an intrinsic part of meaning in the source text. 'Ghosts' often includes references to colour in the very fabric of the discourse. The wordplay with blue and black in the phrase 'out of the blue' and in the verb 'black out' not only enhances the playfulness made possible by linguistic resources, it also reinforces interpretative possibilities that will be shut out in the Portuguese version, not because the translators are incompetent, but because languages *think* differently. The two existing versions in European Portuguese showcase the impossibility. (In the examples below, the observations in brackets are my own.)

> *1.*
> Então, inesperadamente [unexpectedly ≈ out of the blue], começa a considerar outra possibilidade (Auster, 1990b, p. 223).
> E então, inesperadamente [unexpectedly ≈ out of the blue], começa a considerar uma outra possibilidade (Auster, 1999, p. 189).

> *2.*
> [Azul] Dá mais um passo no quarto e depois desmaia [faints≈blacks out], caindo no chão como se tivesse morrido (Auster, 1990b, p. 224).

[Azul] Dá mais um paso para dentro do quarto e depois desmaia [faints≈blacks out], caindo no chão como se estivesse morto (Auster, 1999, p. 190).

The translations of example 2, particularly, evince an inevitable loss of meaning for the phrasal verb 'black out' inequivocally suggests the metamorphosis of Blue into Black mentioned above as the more denotative 'desmaiar' does not. Examples such as these abound in the text. Again, translators cannot but remain othered, at the outskirts of meaning production, so to speak, as there is no possibility of 'blacking out' themselves, i.e., metaphorically metamorphosing into the author and its language.

Therefore, it can be argued that colours erect frontiers, as they may at times be a powerful reminder that '[l]anguages separate us and discommunicate, not simply because they are different languages, but because they proceed from different mental pictures, from disparate intellectual systems — in the last instance, from divergent philosophies. Not only do we speak, but we also think in a specific language, and intellectually slide along preestablished rails prescribed by our verbal destiny' (Ortega y Gasset, 2000 [1937], p. 59). Seen as such, colours might be provocatively said to be an instance of the fascist nature of language, as Barthes has provocatively put it (Barthes, 1978, p. 14), as they both generate and impede meaning. This, however, should not hinder translation. On the contrary, it should encourage it as the radically human gesture it is: 'The destiny of Man—his privilege and honor—is never to achieve what he proposes, and to remain merely an intention, a living utopia' (Ortega y Gasset, 2000 [1937], p. 50).

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