

YOUR COUNTRY IS OF GREAT SUBTLETY:
ASPECTS OF THE BRAZILIAN TRANSLATION OF PATRICK WHITE'S VOSS

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Abstract

A number of the dialogues in Patrick White's *Voss* (1957), especially those involving Laura Trevelyan, involve an implicit debate about what is meant by country and what it means to live in a country. Is the colony of New South Wales simply a province of the British Empire, a little piece of Britain transplanted on the other side of the world, or is it a place where British settlers will have to adapt their ways and gradually be transformed into something new? In these dialogues, each speaker makes use of words such as *country*, *colony*, *property* and *land* in order to express their vision of the place where they find themselves, frequently forcing a shift of meaning from one sentence to the next. This study examines how this debate is carried out in the novel and how it functions in Paulo Henriques Britto's 1985 Brazilian translation.

Keywords: Patrick White; *Voss*; Australian Literature; Translation.

Most New World¹ countries are republics, and many of them celebrate the date of their independence from a European empire, following the model established by the United States in 1776. Most New World readers can look back to the mid-nineteenth century as a time when their countries had already established the independence they celebrate, and to the mid-twentieth century as a time when such independence was so self-evident as to be beyond discussion. As a result, most New World readers would expect little ambiguity—indeed little room for discussion – in relation to the use of the term *country* in a novel published in 1957 and set in 1845.

Australia, although certainly a part of the New World, is not typical of it, primarily because

European colonisation began there much later than in the Americas, with the result that most of the New World had already cut its imperial ties by 1850, while the continent of Australia was still divided between a handful of British colonies with a combined non-indigenous population of less than half a million. The world represented in *Voss* is one where the term *country* has yet to acquire the meaning of an autonomous political unit. Australia is also atypical in that it has no independence day and is not a republic: its political autonomy was achieved gradually from within the British Empire, rather than in a decisive moment of rupture, and it retains certain constitutional ties with the British monarchy.² The world in which *Voss* was

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written was one where the author could be both an Australian and a Londoner, and where the absence of political conflict between those two conditions would have been quite unremarkable, especially among the propertied classes. One of the things that White's novel does is to represent being British and being Australian; it asks *what is country?* in subtle ways which, for typical New World readers, are so unexpected as to be almost completely invisible.

In this article, we examine what becomes of *country* and related terms in Paulo Henriques Britto's 1985 Brazilian translation of *Voss*, but that means dealing with the ways in which Brazil is just as much of an outlier among the countries of the New World as Australia is. If Australia was still part of an empire in the mid nineteenth century, Brazil actually *was* an empire, and in fact that rarest of things, a New World empire. The date which is celebrated as Brazil's Independence Day marks the moment in 1822 when the old Portuguese Empire was split in two, with the European, African and Asian portions remaining under the control of Lisbon, while the American territories were regrouped as the Brazilian Empire, under the control of Rio de Janeiro. This arrangement lasted until 1889, and came to an end—again atypically—not through any process of decolonisation, but through a military coup which simply rebadged the empire as a republic, without substantially changing either its internal or external power structures. Brazilians in the twenty-first century may well think of the Brazilian Empire as merely a former name for their country, but it was genuinely imperial in relation to its neighbours, and perhaps even more so in repeatedly crushing attempts at provincial or regional autonomy.

In *Voss*, the word *country* leads us into a historically specific and quite complex set of relationships between an empire and one of its provinces; Brazil, on the other hand, is a country which can itself be thought of as an empire under another name, with its own complex relationships between provinces and centres of power. As a result, it is no easy task to render the play of meanings that surrounds White's use of the word *country* in a Brazilian translation. Our aim is not to analyse Britto's translation *per se*, but simply to examine

the lexical choices that render that play of meanings essentially invisible in the text in Portuguese.

The discussion around *country* in *Voss* takes place against a background of what is and is not *foreign*: White's first chapter begins when the maid, Rose Portion, announces the presence of a man, and Laura Trevelyan, suggesting a distinction of social class, asks whether he is not, by chance, a gentleman. Rose, a former convict, is unsure how to classify the visitor in terms of class, but recognises a more fundamental distinction: "It is a kind of foreign man;" Laura accepts this definition, concluding that "It can only be the German" (White 7), thus confirming a commonality that includes the servant and her mistress, while setting them apart from the man who speaks English with a "blundering, thick accent" (White 10). This commonality has nothing to do with having been born in the colony of New South Wales, nor indeed with feeling any particular sense of belonging there: all three of these characters were born in Europe, and it is the explorer who feels "at home" in a landscape that is "like the poor parts of Germany," whereas Laura is "afraid of the country which, for lack of any other, she supposed was hers" (White 11). *Foreign*, at this point, would seem to mean *non-British*: inasmuch as it involves any sense of nation or geopolitical unit, that unit would be the British Empire, not anything we would now call a country. Mrs Bonner feels pity for "one who had been born a foreigner" (White 17), that is, not a subject of Queen Victoria. Her guests, the Palethorpes, recognise Voss as a foreigner, someone whose manners are not British (White 24). The narrator describes Voss as a foreigner as he sits under a tree and is mistaken by a passing tramp for a fellow tramp (White 26). But when Laura eventually uses the word *foreign* herself, after her first conversation with Voss, she is referring not to the German, but to the Australian land itself: frightening, "foreign and incomprehensible" (White 29). It is Laura who first begins to distinguish between the old belonging of Britishness and a new belonging based on connection with a specific place.

Unsurprisingly, this ambivalence is absent from Britto's translation. Whenever the word *foreign* is applied to Voss, it is translated as *estrangeiro*, in a

sense that can only be understood as political, as a matter of citizenship. Rather than interpreting Laura's exasperation "that strange, foreign men should come on a Sunday morning" (White 7) as referring in general to men about whom there is something strange or foreign, it is transformed into the singular, to "um estrangeiro" (Britto 8),³ which is far closer to *that a foreigner should come*. On the other hand, when Laura describes her adopted country as *foreign*, the word is translated as "estranha" (Britto 30), which is simply *strange*. This effect is compounded by a footnote which explains Rose Portion's status as a former convict by explaining that this refers to (and here we back-translate the footnote) "individuals who had been deported to penal colonies in Australia and who had remained in the country after serving their sentence" (Britto 10). The word used for *country* here is *país*, and a *país* is a country in the geopolitical sense: an autonomous political unit that could be a full member of the United Nations, a category that includes the United States, India and Brazil, but not Kurdistan, the Palestinian Territories or Australia in 1845, and the suggestion is either that penal colonies existed within this country, or that there had been a transformation from colony to country prior to 1845.

Since the Brazilian reader will typically take this at face value, assuming that Australia was in fact a country in this sense in the mid-nineteenth century, the expectation set up in the first pages of the novel is of a simple, straightforward and utterly anachronistic opposition between *Australian* and *foreign*: an opposition which reverberates down through the novel, and which serves to obscure many of the subtleties of the dialogues that follow.

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In his first conversation with Laura, it is Voss who introduces the word *country*, which begins to shift between meanings related to a political or administrative unit, or to the human community that inhabits it, and to the qualities of the land itself. In his initial question – "do you go out much into your country?" (White 11) – "your country" suggests that it belongs to the British settlers, not to the German, but "into" suggests

the experience of entering the landscape itself. These three words, *into*, *your* and *country* – are manipulated throughout the dialogue that follows. Initially, Laura removes the prepositional phrase, replying that "we drive out sometimes;" Voss sees the landscape as a space to be entered, whereas for Laura it is simply a space outside, beyond the safety of the town. Voss suggests that Laura sits on the edge of her country and could go more deeply into it, but she understands *country* as existing in opposition to *town*; for Voss, Sydney is part of the country, whereas for Laura it is not.

She then states that "a week in the country makes a change," declining any reference to personal ownership; as they spend their time "with friends, on a property," the particular portion of land belongs neither to her nor to Voss. The German, however, replies with "your country is of great subtlety," clearly stressing the physical aspect of the land, but also insisting on the possessive: the subtlety is attributed to a British land, not a neutral one. It is at this point, during a lull in the conversation, that the narrator describes Laura as being "afraid of the country which, for lack of any other, she supposed was hers," combining the two meanings of the word. It is in the experiential sense of being in the land that she is *afraid* of the country, but it can only be as an administrative unit—and one that is not her native England—that it is *hers*. When she speaks again, she steers clear of this awkwardly ambiguous word and chooses one that emphasises the simplicity of the imperial relationship, asking "Is it long since you arrived in the Colony?" (White 11).

These four instances of the word *country* are translated as three different words, and the phrase *your country* is treated quite differently on the two occasions that it appears. The opposition between *go out into* and simply *drive out* is quite absent, as is the sense that the country belongs, somehow, to Laura and not to Voss: the German's initial question merely makes reference to the "interior" (Britto 11), which suggests the non-urban part of a territory, making no distinction between rural areas and land left in its natural state, whatever that might be. Here, the opposition between *country* and *town*, introduced in Laura's reply, is already present in Voss' question, and the tension is lost.

In Laura's reply to Voss, *property* loses its specific sense of ownership and becomes *sítio*, suggesting a small farm, and the term used for the *week in the country-campo*—further emphasises the idea of agriculture or grazing, rather than any possibility of an encounter with wilderness. In the original, Voss insists on his possessive expression, *your country*, but with a stronger emphasis on the experience of the land: Britto, on the other hand, uses the word *país*, as in the earlier footnote. This is clearly unhelpful, not only because the *country* in question (be it New South Wales or Australia) clearly is not a country in the geopolitical sense, but also because even if it were, it is not in that sense that it possesses great subtlety: the whole thrust of the German's comment relates to a physical land, not to a political unit. A logical consequence of this choice, although even more unfortunate, is that Laura is then portrayed as being afraid not of a certain experience of the land, but of a political unit, a *país*. It is far from obvious what sort of fear this would be, and the idea is likely to sound bizarre even to the Brazilian reader with no access to the original text.

Laura's use of (upper case) "Colony" is translated here as (lower case) "colônia" (Britto 12), as indeed it is throughout the novel, receiving a capital letter in only one instance. A territory that has already been referred to as a *país* (i.e. politically independent) cannot logically be a *colônia* in the sense of a subordinate unit within an empire, which is one of the things that the word could imply in Brazilian Portuguese, as *colony* does in English. The word *colônia* may also, however, suggest a small settlement on an agricultural frontier, such as those founded in southern Brazil by Germans or Italians in the nineteenth century. The reader of the Brazilian translation has already come across *colônia* in the context of Laura's limited access to reading matter "in that remote colony" (White 9), where the focus on remoteness would seem to reinforce this second sense of the word. As a result, whereas Laura's shift from *country* to (upper case) *Colony* indicates a retreat from the ambiguity of *country*, to the comfort of an administrative unit in a stable relationship with a powerful empire and with the place of her birth, the shift from *país* to (lower case) *colônia* would, for many

readers, have almost the opposite effect, of a movement from a concept of political autonomy to one which suggests a small-scale agricultural settlement. This effect is reinforced by Britto's use of the noun *colono* (Britto 121, 129, 163) where White uses the nouns *colonial* and *settler* (White 114, 121, 154), as a *colono* would typically be an inhabitant of a *colônia* in the agricultural frontier sense.

During the lull in the conversation, when Laura thinks of comparing Voss to other men of her social rank, the two categories that come to mind are "English officers stationed there" and "young landowners [...] from the country" (White 11). Here *country* is simply the land, the interior, that which is not the town of Sydney, yet the juxtaposition of the officers who remain English and will return to England with the men who are putting down roots in New South Wales suggests a possible experiential division between the Old World and the New. In Britto's translation, the landowners are simply from the "interior" (Britto 12), which is literally correct, but elides the slight possibility of a new kind of identity.

These same categories appear in the context of two marriage proposals that Laura had almost received, "one from a merchant before he sailed for Home, and one from a grazier of some substance" (White 15). This reference to *Home* is of course no eccentricity of Laura's, but a common usage, and appears a number of times in the novel, always semi-officialised by its capital letter: the arrival of two Royal Navy ships prompts "nostalgia for Home" (White 298), for example, while an amateur astronomer records his observations of the comet "and will send a report Home" (White 375). Even a young girl, born in the colony, repeats the words of her elders when she talks of how her mother "had left for Home" (White 398). (It is interesting to note, however, that in the final chapter—set some twenty years after the first, to which we will now return—the term *Home* no longer appears, despite the fact that it would still have been common usage.) All of these usages of *Home* are translated as "Inglaterra" (Britto 16, 315, 397, 422), which literally means *England*, but which Brazilians also typically use without distinction for Great Britain and for the United Kingdom. Clearly any distinction between the different components of the United Kingdom is lost,

but—more importantly—so is the sense that the Old Country is somehow still seen as a source of comfort. This connection with a colonial power would be very unusual for Brazilian readers, as Brazil’s relationship with Portugal has typically been based neither on longing nor on respect, certainly not on any sense of the former metropolis as a source of cultural authority. As Antonio Candido expressed it, comparing nineteenth century romanticism and early twentieth century modernism, “whereas the first seeks to overcome Portuguese influence and establish in contrast the literary identity of Brazil, the second purely and simply ignores Portugal[...] the old mother country had ceased to exist for us as a term to be confronted and overcome”⁴ (Candido 119). By avoiding the tricky questions surrounding the translation of *Home*, Britto misses the chance to tease his readers with a sense that Australia is not simply an English-speaking version of Brazil.

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Back in the first chapter, the other members of the household return home, and a new phase begins in both the conversation and the translation. The word *bush* makes its first appearance, translated variously as “mato” and “interior” (Britto 18), the latter suggesting all land outside of Sydney, and the former, a kind of vegetation which we might think of as *scrub*. *Interior*, with its sense of *that which is not Sydney*, is also used during the conversation between Voss and Edmund Bonner, his sponsor and Laura’s uncle, when Voss declares that he is “compelled into this country” (White 20). As in the explorer’s earlier question to Laura about going *into the country*, the translation again negates the German’s sense—indicated by “this”—of moving more deeply into a country of which Sydney is a part. It could be said that Britto’s use of *interior* consistently blurs the distinction between these two conceptions of *country*.

Shortly afterwards, while discussing potential members of the proposed expedition, Bonner mentions Angus, “owner of a valuable property in the neighbourhood of Rhine Towers” (White 22); on its previous appearance, *property* had been translated as *sítio*, but now it appears as “terras” (Britto 23). In its

singular and plural forms, this word will henceforth be used to translate a range of terms, including “bare *earth*” (White 190), “the *dust* was hot beneath their feet” (White 391), “solid *ground*” (White 440), “the promised *shore*” (White 446), and “moist *soil*” (White 447), as well as *land*, in the senses of personal property—“grappled for ever to their land” (White 135)—, political unit—“clearing and populating their adopted land” (White 30)—and natural space—“the land was celebrating their important presence with green grass” (White 333). More significantly, from this point on, *terra* is also used to translate *country*, appearing for the first time in the same paragraph as its use for *property*, and immediately becoming the default solution. This creates the impression that, had Britto been given the opportunity to revise his work more thoroughly, he would probably have arrived at more consistent solutions for the earliest parts of the novel.

In the conversation that continues after Voss has left the house, the play of meanings around the words *country* and *Colony* continues, following the same pattern as the previous discussion between Laura and the explorer: after a series of statements that juggle with the meaning of *country*, the word is abandoned and the conversation ends with a single instance of *Colony*. The word *country* appears eight times, being translated seven times as *terra* and once as *páís*. The first to offer an opinion is Emmy, wife of Laura’s merchant uncle, who questions the good sense of sending the German to the interior of what she describes as “this miserable country” (White 27), although here it is not exactly the place that is miserable, but its climate, for she is more concerned with the fate of her skin than with that of the explorer. When she sighs “Ah, this country!”, it is because she “remembered others and feared for her complexion” (White 28). Both of these instances are rendered as “terra” (Britto 29, 30).

The discussion between Laura and Bonner, of which Emmy’s observations are a part, offers an impression of the change that Voss has worked in the young woman. Previously, she appeared to prefer the term *Colony* to *country*, which caused her unconfessed fear; now it is precisely those fears that she brings to the surface. In her first intervention, Laura indicates a difference

between Voss's vision and that of "other men" who wish only to "make a fortune out of this country" (White 28). Bonner protests against this rejection of pragmatism and insists on a definition of *country* that suggests a New World of opportunities, unlike the Old World where everything has already been done: this is "the country of the future" (White 28). In this declaration there is no sense whatever of a desire for political independence—after all, Bonner's own shopfront proclaims him to be an "ENGLISH DRAPER" (White 19)—but rather of a place where a man can make a success of himself precisely through the exercise of what he no doubt perceives as British values. In the translation, Britto uses "terra" for Laura's statement, but "país" (Britto 30) for that of her uncle, not only losing the sense of verbal jousting, but creating a sense of political separation which is not present in the original. This is further reinforced by the fact that the translation omits any reference to his being an *English* draper (Britto 20). At the end of Bonner's speech, when his full mouth protests "this country" (White 28), it is clearly in reference to the views expressed both by Laura and himself, but Britto again uses *terra*, so that Bonner appears to make a connection with Laura's words, but not with his own.

Despite her uncle's opposition, Laura continues her revelation of new mysteries, insisting that Voss is obsessed by the place and feels no fear in relation to it, whereas the British settlers are "still afraid[...] of this country" (White 28) and do not understand it. This fear and incomprehension logically have nothing to do with the *country* that Bonner speaks of, with its opportunities in the textile market, but with the land itself—not with the British New World, but with the ancient Australian continent on which it was planted. Young Belle Bonner understands what her cousin is saying and replies that she "would not like to ride very far into it" for fear of finding "a lot of blacks, and deserts, and rocks, and skeletons [...] of men that have died" (White 28), but her fiancé, Lieutenant Radclyffe, scoffs at the suggestion of fear. Laura intensifies her image of the place, insisting that "it is not my country, although I have lived in it" (White 29); to live in a particular land does not guarantee possession of it, whatever the law may say. The young woman admits that, for her, the country is

"foreign and incomprehensible," and that the only one who can comprehend this strangeness is, ironically, the foreigner, Voss, for the land "is his by right of vision" (White 29). The contrast between a geopolitical and an existential sense of *country* could hardly be clearer, and all of these occurrences of *country* are translated as *terra*, although Belle Bonner's "it" is translated as "interior" (Britto 30).

Bonner, on the other hand, rejects the concept of a spiritual connection with the land and abandons the ambiguous term *country*, exactly as Laura had done in her earlier conversation with Voss, except that where Laura had fled from the accusation of the possessive *your country* to the impersonal safety of *the Colony*, Bonner's movement is from the more abstract presence of *this country*—repeated seven times in two pages—to the proprietary satisfaction of *our Colony*. "Here we are talking about our Colony as if it did not exist until now," complains this man of business, who continues to talk of progress, of houses and public buildings, of dedicated administrators and (to make it clear that the land and its products are commodities, not spiritual values) of "the solid achievement of those men who are settling the land" (White 29).

Colony is translated, as before, as *colônia*, without the capital letter, and thus without the clarity of the distinction, whereas *land* is translated as *terra*, just as *country* had formerly been. *Terra* is a perfectly adequate translation for *land* at this point, but the fact that it corresponds to the term used throughout the discussion for *country* blurs the way in which Bonner is deliberately shifting the discourse onto different ground. In this dialogue, it is fair to say that Bonner's point of view is that of the empire: he is intent on incorporating Australian opportunities into British values and markets. Laura, on the other hand, appears to recognise that life cannot simply go on unchanged in such a disturbingly different place. The interplay between these two visions continues throughout the novel.

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In the next four chapters of the novel, leading up to the departure of the expedition party from Sydney,

the word *country* appears ten times, always translated as *terra* in either the singular or the plural. In chapter 6, *country* appears nine times, being translated on only four occasions as *terra*, with the five remaining instances being rendered as five different words – *paragens*, *bandas*, *paisagem*, *lugar*, and *descampados* – none of which is used again. Perhaps this odd profusion of terms can be explained by the fact that this is the first chapter where Voss and his party are actually experiencing *country* concretely, as something to be seen and felt and ridden through, because this level of variation does not recur in the remainder of the novel.

In chapters 7 to 15, which represent the remainder of the expedition and its immediate aftermath, *country* appears 39 times, being translated as *terra* in 25 of them. On five occasions, there is no direct equivalent for *country* in the translation: the “copious and satisfying record of their journey through his country” (White 198), for example, becomes simply a record of the journey, perhaps because it is unclear exactly what it is that Voss has come to possess. When Laura’s uncle suggests that “many a young fellow in the country would jump at the opportunity” (White 402) of marriage with her and a partnership in the store, the translator avoids the issue of whether the country in question might include any part of New South Wales or only from the rural areas, by simply omitting the term. Finally, when Jackie leaves “the country of the dead behind him” (White 420), the translator has him simply leaving the dead themselves, thereby losing any sense of *country* as alive with spirits.

The nine remaining instances in these chapters include two uses of *interior*, always with the sense of distinguishing between Sydney and remoter areas, a relatively unremarkable *região* (region) in Dr Badgery’s question “are you well acquainted with the country?” (White 319), and an equally reasonable *terreno* (terrain) when every man on the expedition is “aching as if he had ridden miles over the roughest country” (White 345). The more questionable choices are five instances of *país*. One of them is simply odd – the metaphorical “cold, nebulous country of the stars” (White 391) being equated with a geopolitical unit –, but the others are quite misleading. In chapter 9,

when Laura is writing a letter to Voss, she uses the word *country* twice in one paragraph, referring first to the fact that she has “begun to understand this great country, which we have been presumptuous enough to call ours”, and then to the idea that “a country does not develop through the prosperity of a few landowners and merchants, but out of the suffering of the humble” (White 239). *Country* does not have precisely the same meaning in these two sentences – one refers more directly to the land, the other to the human community that lives in it – but the two concepts are clearly related and deserve to be translated in such a way as to make that connection. Britto, unfortunately, opts for *terra* to describe the land, but *país* to describe the society. This would seem to suggest that *development* is to be understood purely in economic terms, but that is precisely what Laura is denying.

Before turning to the final chapter, the three uses of *país* in chapter 14 are associated not with development, but with duty. When Laura announces that she plans to become a school teacher, she argues “Why should I not exercise my wits? They are all I brought into the country when I came here as a poor immigrant. [...] And now it is my hope to give the country something in return”, to which her uncle replies, “The country, [...] I am always the first to do any duty by the country” (White 403). To translate all four of these instances of *country* as *país* would be anachronistic but coherent; instead, Britto renders the first as *terra*, suggesting that a political transition has taken place within Laura’s lifetime, that it was to a *land* that she brought her wits, but that it is to a politically independent *country* that she will offer them, a country which both she and her uncle refer to as “meu país” (my country) (White 427), despite the absence of the possessive in the original.

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In 1845, the colony of New South Wales was administered by a Governor appointed by Queen Victoria; at the ceremony to mark the beginning of Voss’s expedition, the Governor is ill and his speech is read by a colonel. Twenty years after the expedition, a statue of Voss is unveiled not by a representative of the

Crown, but by the leader of an elected government, and the audience has changed as much as the speaker: in 1845, “stiff necks were bent into attitudes that suggested humble attention” (White 113), whereas in 1865 there are open complaints about the Government’s “slowness in developing the country” (White 436). In this instance, *country* does suggest an administrative unit with its own government, economy and destiny, presumably different from that of the imperial centre; its translation as *país* is anachronistic, but not entirely unhelpful (Britto 463).

At this point, Laura and Judd – the only survivors of Voss’s megalomania – appear to converge on a definition of *country* based on suffering, as initially proposed in Laura’s letter. For Judd, “Voss left his mark on the country” and in fact “is there in the country, and always will be” because “if you live and suffer long enough in a place, you do not leave it altogether” (White 443); Laura recognises that she knows little of the land she now confidently calls “our country”, but suggests that “perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind” (White 446). Both of Judd’s instances of *country* are translated as *terra*, although the second one is rendered as “aquela terra” (that country) (Britto 470), which tends to suggest that Sydney and the place where Voss died are not necessarily part of the same place. Laura’s *our country*, however, loses its possessive and becomes “esta terra” (this country) (Britto 473); *the country* and *our country* give the impression of different perspectives on the same place, whereas *that country* and *this country* give the impression of a geographical distinction which is simply not present in the original. As noted above, the *country of the stars* became a geopolitical *país*, and the *country of the dead* became simply the dead themselves: here, the *country of the mind* is rendered as “desertos do espírito” (Britto 473), the *deserts of the spirit*. Any possibility of a play of meanings between *our country* and the *country of the mind* is lost, as indeed is the suggestion that the true knowledge that can be obtained in this country is just as available to Laura as it was to Voss. The translation suggests that Voss’s death in the desert is somehow closer to enlightenment than are Laura’s experiences in Sydney, an interpretation that

she may well share, but which the novel itself appears to work against.

Among the people involved in the discussion in this final section of the novel are two artists, the music teacher Topp and the painter Willie Pringle, who had broken the filial connection with the United Kingdom by going to study his art in France (White 435). Twenty years earlier, the Englishman Topp had rejected any connection with the colony, saying “It is no country of mine, [...] except for the unfortunate accident of my being here,” but over time “out of his hatred for the sour colonial soil [...] had developed a perverse love” (White 40, 445). (In these two instances, both *country* and *soil* are translated as *terra*.) With Laura’s words, he starts to imagine the possibility of expressing this perverse love in a new music, a “stubborn music [...] Of rock and scrub. Of winds curled invisibly in wombs of air. Of thin rivers struggling towards seas of eternity. All flowing and uniting. Over a bed of upturned faces”. In these faces, in this odd image that brings together community and territory, he runs up against a limit: “our mediocrity as a people” (White 446). In the 1840s, even those who spoke in terms of *country* had not begun to suggest that New South Wales possessed a distinct *people*, although one schoolgirl had recognised that “we are not English, not properly, not any more” (White 398). In the 1860s, the concept no longer appears shocking: the Australian can apparently continue to be British without any longer being English. Willie Pringle does not deny the existence of this mediocrity, but sees it not as “a final and irrevocable state,” but as a period of transition and “a creative source of endless variety and subtlety” (White 447). Unlike Topp, he was born in Australia and perceives his native culture not as the absence of the Old World, but as the possibility of something new.

It is this newness that is ultimately recognised in the final, and in a sense crucial, dialogue of the novel, where the word *country* is used three times, but never rendered as *terra*. Here, Mr Ludlow, a drunken Englishman, begins by remarking: “I have been travelling through your country” (White 448); twenty years before, to be English was not to be a foreigner in New South Wales, but this visitor recognises that in some sense this country now belongs to those who

have the experience of living there. The utterly tentative nature of this recognition is, however, concealed by the translator, who renders *country* as *país*, as if the issues of political independence and cultural identity were beyond question. He then describes New South Wales (or Australia?) as “a country with a future” (White 448), which again is rendered as *país*, as it was twenty years earlier, when Edmund Bonner (with the greater conviction of one who plans to put down roots) used the expression “the country of the future” (White 28). Excluding the oddity of the cold, nebulous country of the stars, there are ten occasions when *country* is translated as *país*: two are directly associated with the future (White 28, 448), two with development (White 239, 436), and three with duty (White 403). A further three are associated with a conversation between Laura and a foreigner (the German Voss, in the first chapter, the English Mr Ludlow, in the last) who attributes the land to her by means of a possessive pronoun (White 11, 448). For a translator from a country that dates its independence from 1822, all of these instances suggest a kind of political and economic unit that would quite naturally be thought of as a *país*; the problem is that it is precisely the subtly shifting sense of relationship and identity within the British Empire that is being debated in these crucial dialogues, and the Brazilian reader is not given the opportunity to look at the world from that angle.

The final instance of *country* appears—fittingly—in Laura Trevelyan’s penultimate pronouncement, that Voss “is there still, it is said, in the country” (White 448), and is rendered as *deserto*, just as her earlier *country of the mind* had become the *deserts of the spirit*. She is, in fact, quoting Judd, who had said, not long before, that Voss “is there in the country, and always will be” (White 443), except that when Judd said it, Voss was in the *terra*, so why is he now so much more specifically, and more distantly, in the *deserto*? On both these occasions, there seems to be a tendency in the translation to separate Laura’s experience from that of Voss, as if the novel were simply an adventure about a German who dies in the desert, as if Laura’s changing relationship with her adopted land were of no consequence, as if the entire debate about what will

eventually become an Australian nation were in fact not present. The novel may be called *Voss*, but that does not alter the fact that Laura is its central consciousness. If the debate were actually carried out in terms of *nation*, it would be immediately recognisable to the Brazilian reader, but the word *nation* appears precisely once in the novel, and the nation it refers to is England, when the objects collected by Palfreyman’s peer “were quickly swathed and handed to the nation” (White 46). Unfortunately, that same debate carried on in terms of the shifting associations of *country* seems to have been invisible to the translator, and will therefore remain so for his readers.

Notes

1. Defined here as that portion of the Western cultural sphere which lies outside Europe.
2. In this sense, it is of little consequence whether or not Australia’s population decides one day to call itself a republic and wave goodbye to the monarchy: the fact that such a move can be described by its proponents as *overdue* indicates that it is unlikely ever to be imagined in terms of *independence*.
3. For the sake of simplicity, references to the Brazilian version will be cited under the name of the translator.
4. Our translation.

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Recebido em: 27/01/2016

Aceito em: 24/03/2016