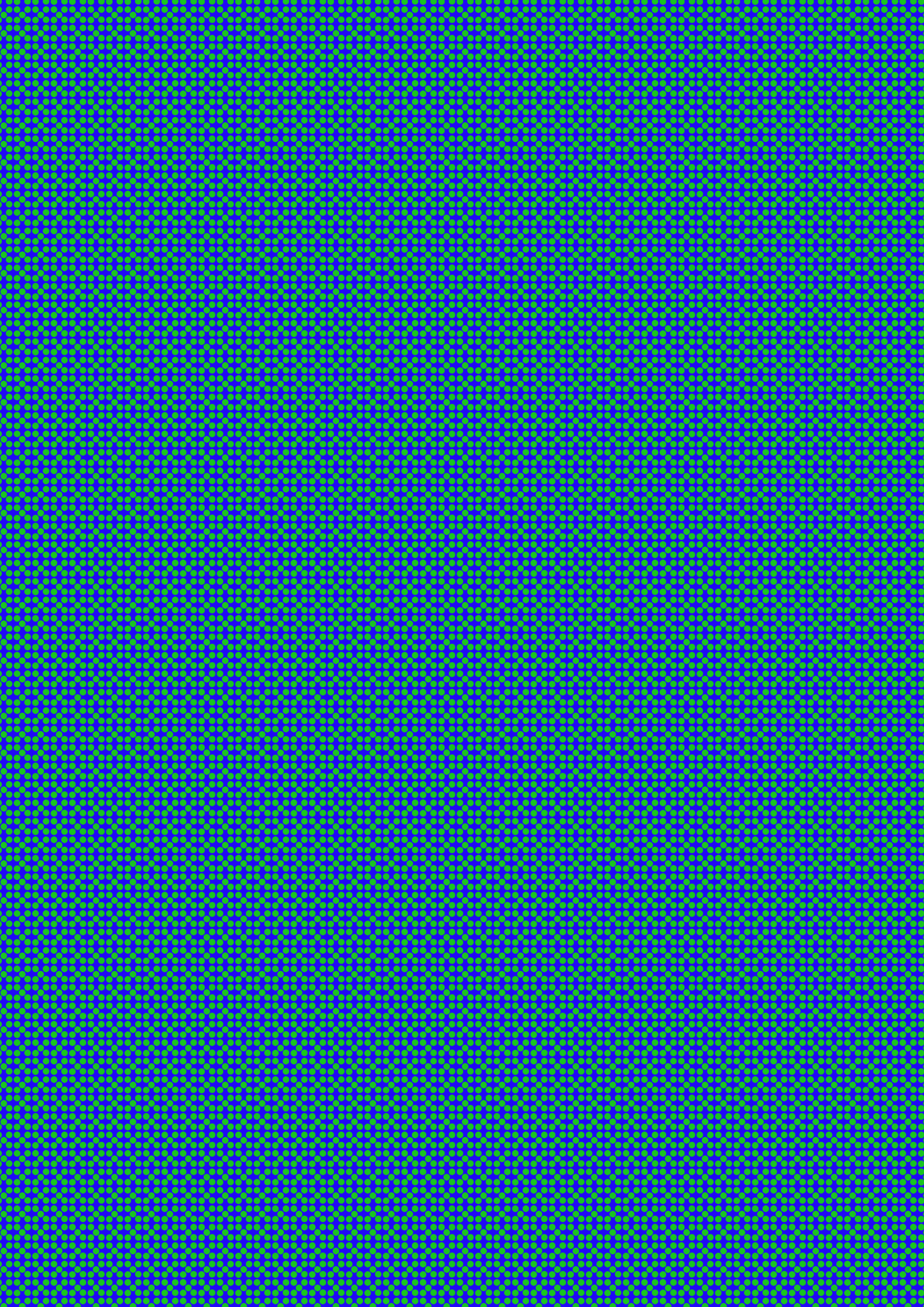
TRADUÇÕES



O Tempo Suspenso: a tradução da narrativa de guerra “An Occurrence At Owl Creek Bridge” de Ambrose Bierce

Tradução de Alane Melo da Silva[1] e Yuri Santos Monteiro[2]
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

Sobre o conto e a tradução

“An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” é um conto escrito por Ambrose Bierce, um renomado escritor, jornalista e soldado estadunidense. Publicado pela primeira vez em 1890, a narrativa se desenvolve durante a Guerra Civil Americana, um conflito armado que ocorreu entre 1861 e 1865. A guerra foi travada entre os estados do norte dos Estados Unidos, conhecidos como a União, que defendiam a abolição da escravização, e os estados do sul, conhecidos como confederados, que lutaram para manter o sistema escravagista.

O conto apresenta como protagonista Peyton Farquhar, um apoiador dos confederados que é condenado à morte por enforcamento ao ser pego tentando destruir uma ponte que seria utilizada pelo exército da União. O conto tem uma estrutura narrativa repleta de reviravoltas. O autor inicia a história com a descrição detalhada da execução iminente de Farquhar na ponte e a fuga do exército da União. No entanto, no final do conto é revelado aos leitores que o protagonista está apenas imaginando a fuga instantes antes da morte.

A história alterna entre a realidade e a imaginação de Farquhar, criando uma atmosfera de suspense e ilusão. Este é considerado um dos melhores contos de Bierce e foi adaptado para o cinema em 1962 em um curta-metragem dirigido pelo roteirista e diretor de cinema francês Robert Enrico, e venceu o prêmio Oscar nesta categoria.

O conto publicado em 1890 traz o desafio de um vocabulário como muitas nomenclaturas militares e um fluxo de narrativa fragmentado que alterna entre imaginação e realidade. Durante o ato tradutório, fizemos a leitura e a tradução do conto simultaneamente, desta forma, tivemos a experiência de leitores e fomos surpreendidos com as reviravoltas da história.

[1] Doutora em Estudos da Tradução pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. E-mail: alanepoet@gmail.com Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9702-9816.
[2] Doutor em Estudos da Tradução pela Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. E-mail: teacheryurimonteiro@gmail.com Orcid: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2360-8073.

Sobre o processo de tradução, Paulo Henriques Britto, respeitado tradutor e pesquisador brasileiro afirma em seu livro a Tradução literária:

> Não sei alemão e sou um leitor apaixonado de Kafka. Em português, quero vivenciar algo semelhante à experiência que tem um leitor de fala alemã quando lê Kafka no original. Anima-me saber que Modesto Carone, o tradutor brasileiro de Kafka conhece bem o alemão e é um estudioso das obras desse autor; que ele tem consciência de que Kafka escreve seus textos excepcionalmente poéticos num alemão frio e burocrático, e que ele tenta reproduzir esse efeito no português brasileiro. Se eu soubesse que Carone está interessado em afirmar sua autoria das traduções que publica, e por isso utiliza um português claramente diferente do alemão de Kafka, inserindo nelas coloquialismos brasileiros e referências do Brasil de agora; (...) eu simplesmente recorreria a outras traduções de Kafka que não as suas. (BRITTO,2012, p.27)

Britto expressa a paixão pela obra de Kafka e seu desejo de ter uma experiência de leitura o mais próxima possível da obra fonte, levando em consideração as características poéticas e estilísticas do alemão utilizado por Kafka, ele enfatiza a importância de um efeito semelhante a leitura da obra fonte na tradução de obras literárias, especialmente quando se trata de autores renomados como Kafka. Desta mesma forma, acreditamos que manter as principais características narrativas da ficção de Bierce permitiu ao leitor imergir na literatura tão representativa do século XIX, marcada por elementos do nacionalismo americano pós-Guerra Civil e pelas transformações culturais que moldaram a identidade literária dos Estados Unidos.

Como tradutores, alguns princípios norteadores são fundamentais na construção de uma proposta de tradução. Como destaca Bassnett (2002, p.77), "Traduzir literatura é, portanto, mais do que uma transposição de palavras; é um ato de interpretação crítica." Essa interpretação crítica se faz presente em todas as etapas do processo tradutório, guiando as escolhas lexicais e estruturais de modo a manter palavras e frases ajustadas para oferecer ao público brasileiro uma experiência de leitura imersiva e coerente com o conto de Bierce. Ainda conforme Meschonnic (2010, p.57) a tradução pertence ao campo do discurso, é uma operação com a linguagem, e esta, por sua vez, "é uma representação do sentido". O discurso narrativo da ficção de Bierce exige do tradutor mais do que fidelidade lexical: requer atenção a forma que as ideias são construídas no texto, preservando a sua força expressiva e o seu impacto sobre o leitor.

Sobre a tradução para o português, o termo "Owl Creek" foi traduzido como "Rio Coruja". A escolha por "Coruja" mantém a referência à ave do título original e contribui para uma leitura mais natural ao público lusófono, já que se trata de um termo conhecido e culturalmente acessível. Além disso, evita-se o estranhamento causado por um nome

estrangeiro sem perda de sentido, permitindo ao leitor manter a fluidez da leitura sem comprometer o simbolismo presente no texto fonte.

No que tange a estrutura de frases, nossa tradução optou por manter a estrutura de frases complexas do conto em inglês, preservando o ritmo e o tom. Por exemplo, frases longas que descrevem cenários ou estados emocionais são mantidas, o que ajuda a transmitir a tensão e a atmosfera da narrativa. Optamos também em escolher palavras que ressoam com a gravidade da situação descrita. Por exemplo, palavras como "executores" e "corda" são usadas para carregar o peso da cena de execução, refletindo o clima sombrio narrativo. O estilo de narração do conto em inglês foi traduzido para recriar com naturalidade os pensamentos dos personagens, utilizando registros que fazem sentido no português, como a fala dos soldados e a descrição do comportamento militar, que são mantidos em um tom respeitoso e formal, alinhado com a disciplina militar apresentada no texto. A escolha de palavras que indicam a transição entre o presente e os pensamentos de Farquhar. Frases como "seus últimos pensamentos" são estrategicamente colocadas para indicar mudanças entre as realidades, ajudando o leitor a seguir a narrativa fragmentada e a confusão mental do protagonista.

Como tradutores, buscamos entender o contexto histórico da narrativa para apresentar soluções satisfatórias para o português e manter o tom de suspense e ansiedade presente na narrativa de Bierce, bem como seguir a mesma estrutura de estrofes apresentada no texto fonte. Em alguns pontos da narrativa, o leitor fica preso nas páginas ansioso para saber o que acontecerá com o fugitivo, este sentimento de curiosidade se apresenta também na narrativa traduzida que de forma inédita traz um clássico da literatura estadunidense para o público brasileiro.

Ocorrência na Ponte do Rio Coruja[3]

I

Em pé em uma ferrovia no norte do Alabama, ele olhava para as águas rápidas seis metros abaixo de si. As mãos do homem estavam amarradas atrás das costas. Uma corda apertava firmemente seu pescoço, presa a uma trave resistente acima da cabeça, com a folga estendendo-se até seus joelhos. Algumas tábuas soltas colocadas sobre os trilhos do trem forneciam um apoio para ele e os seus executores - dois soldados do exército federal,

[3] Conto de Ambrose Bierce publicado na coletânea *Tales of soldiers and civilians*, Penguin Classics; Standard Edition (February 1, 2000).

comandados por um sargento que na esfera civil poderia ser um agente da polícia. A uma curta distância na mesma plataforma improvisada, estava um oficial armado vestindo um uniforme de sua patente. Ele era um capitão. Um guarda em cada extremidade da ponte segurava um rifle na posição conhecida como "apoio", ou seja, verticalmente na frente do ombro esquerdo, o martelo do rifle descansando no antebraço estendido em linha reta até o peito - uma posição formal e antinatural que forçava uma postura ereta do corpo. Não parecia ser o dever desses dois homens saber o que estava acontecendo no centro da ponte; eles simplesmente bloquearam as duas extremidades que a atravessavam.

Além de um dos guardas, ninguém mais estava à vista; a ferrovia seguia reta em direção a uma floresta por cerca de noventa metros, depois, curvando-se, desaparecia de vista. Sem dúvida, havia um posto avançado mais adiante. A outra margem do rio era terreno aberto - uma suave encosta coberta por centenas de troncos de árvores verticais, com guaritas para os rifles e uma única abertura pela qual se projetava o cano de um canhão de ferro que ocupava a ponte. No meio da encosta, entre a ponte e o forte, estavam os espectadores - uma companhia de infantaria em fila, na posição "descanso de parada", as coronhas dos seus rifles repousavam no chão, os canos inclinavam-se ligeiramente para trás sobre o ombro direito, e as mãos estavam cruzadas sobre as coronhas. Um tenente estava à direita da linha, com a ponta da espada no chão e a mão esquerda apoiada sobre a direita. Exceto pelo grupo de quatro homens no centro da ponte, nenhum outro se movia. A companhia encarava a ponte, olhando fixamente, imóvel. Os guardas, enfrentando as margens do rio, poderiam ter sido confundidos por estátuas que adornavam a ponte. O capitão de braços cruzados, em silêncio, observava o trabalho de seus subordinados sem fazer nenhum movimento. A morte é uma autoridade que, quando anunciada, deve ser recebida com manifestações formais de respeito, mesmo pelos mais familiarizados com ela. No código de disciplina militar, o silêncio e a imobilidade são as formas de respeito para este momento.

O homem que seria enforcado aparentava ter mais ou menos trinta e cinco anos. Era um civil, talvez um fazendeiro, pelo que se observava em suas roupas gastas. Ele tinha traços bonitos - um nariz reto, boca firme, testa larga, da qual seu cabelo longo e escuro penteado para trás caía pelas orelhas até a gola do casaco bem ajustado. Ele usava bigode e barba pontiaguda, mas não tinha costeletas; seus olhos eram grandes, de um cinza escuro, e carregavam uma expressão gentil — algo que dificilmente se esperaria de alguém com o pescoço na forca. Certamente, este não era qualquer assassino. O código militar liberal prevê a execução de muitos tipos de pessoas, e os cavalheiros não são excluídos dele.

Com os preparativos concluídos, os dois soldados se afastaram e ambos retiraram a tábua sobre a qual o homem estava em pé. O sargento virou-se para o capitão, o saudou e colocou-se imediatamente atrás deste oficial, que por sua vez se afastou um passo. Esses movimentos deixaram o condenado e o sargento em pé nas duas extremidades da mesma tábua, que atravessava três das vigas de madeira da ponte. A extremidade na qual o civil estava quase, mas não completamente, alcançava a quarta tábua. Esta tábua havia sido mantida no lugar pelo peso do capitão; agora era mantida pelo peso do sargento. Com um sinal do primeiro, o último se afastaria, a tábua inclinaria e o condenado cairia entre as duas vigas. O arranjo parecia simples e eficaz. Seu rosto não havia sido coberto, nem seus olhos vendados. Ele olhou por um momento para o seu "apoio instável" e, em seguida, deixou o olhar vagar até a água turbulenta do rio, que corria rapidamente sob seus pés. Um pedaço de madeira flutuante chamou sua atenção, e seus olhos o seguiram correnteza abaixo. Como parecia se mover lentamente... Que rio preguiçoso!

Ele fechou os olhos para concentrar os seus últimos pensamentos em sua esposa e filhos. A água, tocada pelo sol da manhã, as névoas sombrias sob as margens a certa distância rio abaixo, o forte, os soldados, o pedaço de madeira flutuante – tudo o havia distraído. E agora ele se tornou consciente de uma nova perturbação. Atravessando o pensamento de seus entes queridos, havia um som que ele não podia ignorar nem entender, uma percussão metálica aguda, com a mesma qualidade sonora de um golpe de um martelo de ferro sobre uma bigorna. Ele perguntou o que era e se estava distante ou próximo - parecia ambos. A recorrência do som era regular, mas tão lenta quanto o badalar de um sino fúnebre. Ele aguardava cada novo golpe com impaciência e - não sabia por que sentia tanta apreensão. Os intervalos de silêncio tornavam-se progressivamente mais longos; as demoras se tornavam enlouquecedoras. Com maior frequência, os sons aumentavam em força e nitidez. Eles machucavam os seus ouvidos como o corte de uma faca; ele temia que fosse gritar. O que ele ouvia era o tique-taque de seu relógio.

Ele abriu os olhos e viu novamente a água abaixo de si. "Se eu pudesse libertar minhas mãos", ele pensou, "eu poderia soltar o laço do pescoço e saltar para o rio. Mergulhando, eu poderia evitar as balas e, nadando vigorosamente, chegar à margem, correr para a floresta e escapar para casa. Minha casa, graças a Deus, ainda está fora do alcance deles; minha esposa e meus filhos ainda estão a salvo do avanço do invasor."

Enquanto esses pensamentos, que precisam ser registrados em palavras, eram rapidamente processados na mente do condenado, o capitão acenou para o sargento. E então este se afastou.

II

Peyton Farquhar era um fazendeiro bem-sucedido, de uma antiga e respeitada família do Alabama. Sendo um escravagista e como outros escravagistas, um político, ele era naturalmente um secessionista original e ardorosamente dedicado à causa do Sul. Circunstâncias de natureza imperiosa, que não é necessário relatar aqui, o impediram de servir naquele exército valente que lutou nas campanhas desastrosas que terminaram com a queda de Corinto, e ele se irritava sob a sua condição inglória ansiando pela liberação de suas forças, pela vida maior de soldado, pela oportunidade de se destacar. Essa oportunidade, ele sentia, viria, como vem para todos em tempos de guerra. Enquanto isso, ele fazia o que podia. Nenhum trabalho era humilde demais para ajudar o Sul, nenhuma aventura era perigosa demais para ele empreender desde que fosse consistente com o caráter de um civil que era, no fundo, um soldado, e que de boa fé e sem muita qualificação concordava com pelo menos parte do ditado francamente vil de que tudo é válido no amor e na guerra.

Uma noite, enquanto Farquhar e a esposa estavam sentados em um banco de madeira ao lado da entrada da propriedade, um soldado com um uniforme cinza chegou em seu portão e pediu um copo de água. A Sra. Farquhar ficou feliz em servi-lo com as suas brancas mãos. Enquanto ela buscava a água, seu marido se aproximou do cavalheiro empoeirado e avidamente pediu notícias do fronte de batalha.

"Os Yankees estão reparando as ferrovias", disse o homem, e estão se preparando para o próximo avanço. Eles chegaram à ponte do Rio Coruja, a colocaram em ordem e construíram um reduto na margem norte. O comandante emitiu uma ordem, que foi publicada em toda a região declarando que qualquer civil que for pego interferindo na ferrovia, pontes, túneis ou trens será sumariamente enforcado. Eu acabei de ver a ordem.

"Quão distante daqui fica a ponte do Rio Coruja?" perguntou Farquhar.

"Mais ou menos uns 50 quilômetros."

"Não há reforços deste lado do rio?"

"Há apenas um pequeno posto de escolta a meio quilômetro, na ferrovia, e um único sentinela neste extremo da ponte."

"Imagine que um homem - que entende de enforcamentos - consiga enganar a escolta e talvez levar vantagem sobre o sentinela", disse Farquhar, sorrindo, "o que ele poderia fazer?"

O soldado refletiu. "Eu estive lá há um mês", respondeu. "Eu observei que a enchente do último inverno juntou uma grande quantidade de madeira flutuante próximo ao pilar no extremo da ponte. Agora está seco e queimaria como um pavio."

A senhora Farquhar havia chegado com a água, que o soldado bebeu rapidamente. Ele agradeceu-lhe respeitosamente, curvou-se para o marido dela e partiu. Uma hora depois, após o anoitecer, ele passou novamente pela plantação, seguindo para o norte na direção de onde havia vindo. Era um batedor federal.

III

À medida que Peyton Farquhar caía da ponte, ele perdeu a consciência e sentiu como se já estivesse morto. Deste estado, ele foi despertado – ao que parecia ser séculos depois por uma forte e dolorosa pressão na garganta, seguida por uma sensação de sufocamento. Um dor intensa pulsava de seu pescoço para baixo, sendo sentida em cada fibra de seu corpo. Essas dores se manifestavam em pulsos ritmados, seguindo linhas bem definidas de ramificação, com uma frequência incrivelmente rápida. Elas eram como correntes de fogo pulsante, aquecendo-o a uma temperatura insuportável. Quanto à cabeça, ele não estava consciente de nada além de uma sensação de plena congestão. Essas sensações não foram acompanhadas por pensamentos. A parte intelectual de sua natureza já havia sido apagada; ele tinha poder apenas para sentir, e sentir era um tormento. Ele estava consciente do movimento. Cercado por uma nuvem luminosa, da qual ele era agora apenas o coração ardente, sem substância material, ele oscilava através de arcos impensáveis de como um vasto pêndulo. Então, de repente, com terrível rapidez, a luz ao seu redor disparou para cima com o barulho de um forte respingo; um rugido terrível estava em seus ouvidos, e tudo ficou frio e escuro. O poder do pensamento foi restaurado; ele sabia que a corda havia arrebentado e ele havia caído no rio. Não houve estrangulamento adicional; o laço em volta de seu pescoço já o estava sufocando e mantinha a água longe de seus pulmões. Morrer enforcado no fundo de um rio! - a ideia parecia-lhe ridícula. Ele abriu os olhos na escuridão e viu acima dele um brilho de luz, mas quão distante, quão inacessível! Ele ainda estava afundando, pois a luz ficava cada vez mais fraca até se tornar apenas um brilho. Então começou a crescer e a brilhar, e ele sabia que estava subindo em direção à superfície - sabia com relutância, pois agora estava muito confortável. “Ser enforcado e afogado”, pensou ele, “não é tão ruim; mas eu não quero ser baleado. Não, eu não serei baleado; isso não é justo.”

Ele não estava consciente do esforço, mas uma dor aguda em seu pulso o informou que ele estava tentando libertar as mãos. Ele deu atenção à luta, como um ocioso poderia observar o feito de um malabarista, sem interesse no resultado. Que esforço esplêndido! - que força magnífica, super-humana! Ah, que belo empenho! Bravo! A corda caiu; seus

braços se separaram e flutuaram para cima, as mãos vagamente vistas de cada lado na luz crescente. Ele as observava com um novo interesse enquanto primeiro uma e depois a outra se lançavam sobre o laço em seu pescoço. Elas o rasgaram e o empurraram ferozmente para o lado, as ondulações se assemelhando às de uma enguia. "Coloque de volta, coloque de volta!" Ele pensou ter gritado essas palavras para as suas mãos, pois o desfazer do laço foi sucedido pela dor mais terrível que ele havia experimentado até então. Seu pescoço doía horrivelmente; seu cérebro estava em chamas, seu coração, que tremulava fracamente, deu um grande salto, tentando sair pela boca. Todo o seu corpo foi torturado e torcido com uma agonia insuportável! Mas as mãos desobedientes não deram atenção ao comando. Eles bateram na água vigorosamente com golpes rápidos para baixo, forçando-o para a superfície. Ele sentiu a cabeça emergir; seus olhos foram cegados pelo sol; seu peito se expandiu convulsivamente, e com uma dor suprema e cortante, seus pulmões engoliram uma grande quantidade de ar, que ele instantaneamente expeliu com um grito!

Ele agora estava plenamente consciente de seus sentidos físicos. Eles estavam sobrenaturalmente aguçados e alertas. Algo na terrível perturbação de seu sistema nervoso os havia despertado e aguçado a tal ponto que agora registravam sensações jamais percebidas. Ele sentia as ondulações tocando seu rosto e ouvia, separadamente, os sons que elas produziam ao atingi-lo. Ele olhou para a floresta na margem do rio, viu as árvores, as folhas em cada uma delas - ele viu até mesmo os insetos sobre as folhas: os gafanhotos, os vagalumes, as aranhas cinzentas esticando as teias de galho em galho. Ele notou as cores prismáticas em todas as gotas de orvalho em um milhão de lâminas de grama. O zumbido dos mosquitos que dançavam acima das correntezas do rio, o bater das asas das libélulas, as batidas das pernas das aranhas d'água, como remos que levantavam seu barco - tudo isso criou uma música audível. Um peixe deslizou debaixo de seus olhos e ouviu o som do corpo dele partindo a água.

Ele havia emergido para a superfície e observava o rio; em um momento, o mundo visível parecia girar lentamente em torno dele, com ele como ponto central, e ele viu a ponte, o forte, os soldados na ponte, o capitão, o sargento, e os os dois soldados, seus executores. Eles eram silhuetas contra o céu azul. Eles gritavam e gesticulavam, apontando para ele. O capitão havia sacado a pistola, mas não atirou; os outros estavam desarmados. Seus movimentos eram grotescos e horríveis, e as formas gigantescas.

De repente, ele ouviu um estampido agudo e algo bateu na água com força a poucos centímetros de sua cabeça, fazendo a água respingar em seu rosto como chuva. Ele ouviu um segundo estampido e viu um dos guardas com seu rifle no ombro, uma leve nuvem de fumaça azul saindo do cano. O homem na água viu o olho do homem na ponte

olhando para ele através da mira da arma. Ele observou que era um olho cinza e lembrou-se de ter lido que olhos cinzentos eram os mais aguçados e que todos os atiradores famosos os tinham. No entanto, este havia errado.

Um redemoinho o havia cercado em meio às ondas do rio e o virado para um lado; ele estava novamente olhando para a floresta na margem oposta ao forte. O som de uma voz clara e alta como um canto monótono ecoou atrás dele e atravessou a água com uma nitidez que perfurou e subjugou todos os outros sons, até mesmo o bater das ondulações em seus ouvidos. Embora não fosse soldado, ele havia frequentado acampamentos o suficiente para conhecer o significado temido daquele canto aspirado, arrastado e deliberado; o tenente na margem estava participando do trabalho da manhã. Com que frieza e impiedade - com que entonação calma e uniforme, pressagiando e impondo tranquilidade nos homens - com que intervalo precisamente medido caíram aquelas palavras cruéis:

"Companhia!... Atenção!... Armas à postos!... Prontos!... Apontar!... Fogo!"

Farquhar mergulhou - mergulhou o mais profundamente que conseguiu. A água rugia em seus ouvidos como a voz do Niágara, ainda assim ele ouviu o trovão surdo da salva e, subindo novamente em direção à superfície, encontrou pedaços brilhantes de metal, singularmente achatados, oscilando lentamente para baixo. Alguns deles tocaram seu rosto e mãos, depois caíram, continuando a descida. Um deles ficou preso entre a gola e pescoço; estava desconfortavelmente quente e ele o arrancou. Ao subir para a superfície, ofegante por ar, ele viu que havia ficado muito tempo debaixo d'água; ele estava perceptivelmente mais abaixo do rio - mais perto da segurança. Os soldados quase haviam terminado de recarregar; os pentes metálicos brilharam subitamente ao sol enquanto eram retirados dos canos, giravam no ar e se encaixavam novamente com precisão. Os dois sentinelas dispararam outra vez — sozinhos e em vão.O homem perseguido viu tudo isso por cima do ombro; ele agora estava nadando vigorosamente com a correnteza. Seu cérebro pensava tão rápido quanto seus braços e pernas; veloz como um raio. "O oficial não cometerá o erro do carrasco novamente", ele pensou. Não é tão fácil desviar de uma salva quanto de um único tiro. Ele provavelmente já deu a ordem para atirar à vontade. Que Deus me ajude, eu não posso desviar de todas as balas!"

Um estrondo terrível a dois metros dele foi seguido por um som alto e apressado que parecia viajar de volta pelo ar até o forte e morrer em uma explosão que agitou o próprio rio em suas profundezas! Uma folha crescente de água curvou-se e caiu sobre ele, o cegando e o sufocando. O canhão havia entrado em ação. Enquanto sacudia a cabeça para se livrar da água, ouviu o disparo desviado zumbindo pelo ar à sua frente — e, num instante, o som seco de galhos estalando e sendo despedaçados na floresta."Eles não vão

repetir isso", pensou. "Da próxima vez, vão usar uma munição menor. Preciso manter os olhos na arma — a fumaça me avisará; o coice da arma vem tarde demais, ele segue a bala. É uma boa arma.

De repente, sentiu-se girar como um pião. A água, as margens, a floresta, a ponte — agora distantes —, o forte e os homens, tudo se misturava e se tornava borrado. Os objetos apareciam apenas como faixas horizontais de cor; era tudo o que conseguia enxergar. Foi engolido por um redemoinho, girando com uma velocidade que o deixava tonto e enjoado. Em poucos instantes, foi lançado sobre o cascalho da margem esquerda do rio — a margem sul —, bem atrás de uma elevação que o protegia dos olhos inimigos.

A súbita parada do movimento e a abrasão da mão no cascalho o devolveram à realidade, e ele chorou de alegria. Cravou os dedos na areia, lançou punhados sobre si e a abençoou em voz alta. Parecia diamantes, rubis, esmeraldas — não conseguia lembrar de nada mais belo que se comparasse àquela areia. As árvores da margem eram como plantas gigantes de jardim; ele percebeu uma ordem definida em sua disposição e inalou a fragrância das flores. Uma estranha luz rosada brilhava entre os troncos, e o vento tocava seus galhos, produzindo a música de harpas eólicas. Não queria mais fugir — estava feliz em permanecer naquele lugar encantado até ser recapturado. Um zumbido e o estalo de tiros nos galhos acima o despertaram do sonho. O atirador frustrado lhe disparava um último adeus. Ele se levantou num pulo, correu pela encosta e mergulhou na floresta.

Durante todo o dia, ele caminhou, traçando seu curso pelo movimento do sol. A floresta parecia interminável; em nenhum lugar ele viu uma brecha, nem mesmo uma estrada de lenhador. Ele não sabia que vivia em uma região tão selvagem. Havia algo estranho nesta revelação. Ao anoitecer, ele estava exausto, faminto e com os pés doloridos. Pensar em sua esposa e filhos o impulsionava. Finalmente, ele encontrou uma estrada que o levou na direção certa. Era tão larga e reta como uma rua da cidade, mas parecia não ter sido percorrida. Não havia campos ao lado dela, nem casas em lugar algum. Nem mesmo o latido de um cachorro sugeriu habitação humana. Os troncos escuros das árvores formavam uma parede reta de cada lado, convergindo no horizonte em um único ponto, como em um diagrama em perspectiva. No alto, olhando para cima através da fenda no bosque, brilhavam grandes estrelas douradas, parecendo estranhas e agrupadas em constelações desconhecidas. Ele tinha certeza de que estavam organizadas segundo uma ordem que guardava um significado secreto e maligno. O bosque ao redor estava cheio de sons peculiares e, uma, duas, três vezes, ele ouviu claramente sussurros numa língua desconhecida.

O pescoço doía e, ao levantar a mão para tocá-lo, ele descobriu que estava terrivelmente inchado. Ele sabia que havia uma marca negra no lugar que a corda o havia

machucado. Seus olhos estavam inchados; ele não conseguia mais fechá-los. A língua estava inchada de sede; ele aliviou a dor empurrando a língua para fora para o ar frio. Como a grama havia amaciado o caminho não percorrido - ele não conseguia mais sentir a estrada sob seus pés!

Apesar do sofrimento, ele havia adormecido enquanto caminhava, pois agora via outra cena — talvez apenas recuperando-se de um delírio. Ele estava parado no portão da própria casa. Tudo está como ele deixou, brilhante e bonito sob o sol da manhã. Ele deve ter caminhado a noite inteira. Ao empurrar o portão e subir pela longa calçada branca, ele avistou roupas femininas; a esposa, parecendo estar de banho tomado, linda e doce, descia a varanda para encontrá-lo. Nos degraus, ela estava esperando, com um sorriso de alegria inefável, uma atitude de graça e dignidade incomparáveis. Ah, como ela é linda! Ele salta para a frente com os braços estendidos. Quando está prestes a abraçá-la, ele sente um golpe atordoante na parte de trás do pescoço; uma luz branca que o cega explode ao seu redor com um som como o choque de um canhão - então tudo é escuridão e silêncio!

Peyton Farquhar estava morto; seu corpo, com o pescoço quebrado, balançava suavemente de um lado para o outro sob as vigas da ponte do Rio Coruja.

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge by Ambrose Bierce

I

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the ties supporting the rails of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners — two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed. He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as "support," that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the forearm thrown straight across the chest — a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body. It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground — a gentle slope topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway up the slope between the bridge and fort were the spectators — a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of their rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock. A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge. The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates, but making no sign. Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age. He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter.

His features were good — a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock coat. He wore a moustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace. These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank, which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth. This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgement as simple and effective. His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his

"unsteadfast footing," then let his gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift-all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or near by — it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each new stroke with impatience and — he knew not why — apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and sharpness. They hurt his ear like the trust of a knife; he feared he would shriek. What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. "If I could free my hands," he thought, "I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader's farthest advance."

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man's brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant. The sergeant stepped aside.

II

PEYTON Farquhar was a well to do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician, he was naturally an original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of an imperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with that gallant army which had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction. That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in wartime. Meanwhile he did what he could. No service was too humble for him to perform in the aid of the South, no adventure to

perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification assented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands. While she was fetching the water her husband approached the dusty horseman and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

"The Yanks are repairing the railroads," said the man, "and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order and built a stockade on the north bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order."

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked.

"About thirty miles." "Is there no force on this side of the creek?"

"Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man — a civilian and student of hanging — should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel," said Farquhar, smiling, "what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tinder."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away. An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

As Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened — ages later, it seemed to him — by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs. These pains appeared to flash along well defined lines of ramification

and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness — of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river! — the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw above him a gleam of light, but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer. Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising toward the surface — knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. “To be hanged and drowned,” he thought, “that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No; I will not be shot; that is not fair.”

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome. What splendid effort! — what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake. “Put it back, put it back!” He thought he shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire, his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes, forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme 4 and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses. They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf — he saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass. The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon flies' wings, the strokes of the water spiders' legs, like oars which had lifted their boat — all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point, and he saw the bridge, the fort, the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic. Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking at the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears. Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly — with what an even, calm intonation, presaging, and enforcing tranquility in the men — with what accurately measured interval fell those cruel words:

"Company!... Attention!... Shoulder arms!... Ready!... Aim!... Fire!"

Farquhar dived — dived as deeply as he could. The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dull thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the

surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly downward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther downstream — nearer to safety. The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets. The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning:

"The officer," he reasoned, "will not make that martinet's error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!"

An appalling splash within two yards of him was followed by a loud, rushing sound, diminuendo, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water curved over him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken an hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

"They will not do that again," he thought; "the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me — the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun."

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round — spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men, all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color — that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick. In few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream — the southern bank — and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants;

he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms. A strange roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunks and the wind made in their branches the music of Aeolian harps. He had not wish to perfect his escape — he was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whiz and a rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman's road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famished. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation. The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up through this rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations. He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood on either side was full of singular noises, among which — once, twice, and again — he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue — he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene — perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forwards with extended arms. As he is about to clasp

her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon — then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.

REFERÊNCIAS

BASSNETT, S. (2002). *Translation Studies*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

BIERCE, Ambrose. *Tales of soldiers and civilians.* Penguin Classics; Standard Edition (February 1, 2000).

BRITTO, Paulo Henriques. *A tradução literária.* Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2012.

MESCHONNIC, H. *Poética do traduzir.* Trad. Jerusa Pires Ferreira e Suely Fenerich. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2010.

An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge

Ambrose Bierce

(1890, *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians*)

I

A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled hisneck.It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the ties supporting the rails of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. At a short remove upon the same temporary platform was an officer in the uniform of his rank, armed.He was a captain. A sentinel at each end of the bridge stood with his rifle in the position known as"support,"that is to say, vertical in front of the left shoulder, the hammer resting on the fore arm thrown straight across the chest — a formal and unnatural position, enforcing an erect carriage of the body.It did not appear to be the duty of these two men to know what was occurring at the center of the bridge; they merely blockaded the two ends of the foot planking that traversed it.

Beyond one of the sentinels nobody was in sight; the railroad ran straight away into a forest for a hundred yards, then, curving, was lost to view. Doubtless there was an outpost farther along. The other bank of the stream was open ground — a gentle slope topped with a stockade of vertical tree trunks, loopholed for rifles, with a single embrasure through which protruded the muzzle of a brass cannon commanding the bridge. Midway up the slope between the bridge and fort were the spectators—a single company of infantry in line, at "parade rest," the butts of their rifles on the ground, the barrels inclining slightly backward against the right shoulder, the hands crossed upon the stock.A lieutenant stood at the right of the line, the point of his sword upon the ground, his left hand resting upon his right. Excepting the group of four at the center of the bridge, not a man moved. The company faced the bridge, staring stonily, motionless. The sentinels, facing the banks of the stream, might have been statues to adorn the bridge.The captain stood with folded arms, silent, observing the work of his subordinates,but making no sign.Death is a dignitary who when he comes announced is to be received with formal

manifestations of respect, even by those most familiar with him. In the code of military etiquette silence and fixity are forms of deference.

The man who was engaged in being hanged was apparently about thirty-five years of age.He was a civilian, if one might judge from his habit, which was that of a planter.

His features were good— a straight nose, firm mouth, broad forehead, from which his long, dark hair was combed straight back, falling behind his ears to the collar of his well-fitting frock coat. He wore a moustache and pointed beard, but now hiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin.The liberal military code makes provision for hanging many kinds of persons, and gentlemen are not excluded.

The preparations being complete, the two private soldiers stepped aside and each drew away the plank upon which he had been standing. The sergeant turned to the captain, saluted and placed himself immediately behind that officer, who in turn moved apart one pace.These movements left the condemned man and the sergeant standing on the two ends of the same plank,which spanned three of the cross-ties of the bridge. The end upon which the civilian stood almost, but not quite, reached a fourth.This plank had been held in place by the weight of the captain; it was now held by that of the sergeant. At a signal from the former the latter would step aside, the plank would tilt and the condemned man go down between two ties. The arrangement commended itself to his judgement as simple an deffective.His face had not been covered nor his eyes bandaged. He looked a moment at his "unsteadfast footing," then leth is gaze wander to the swirling water of the stream racing madly beneath his feet. A piece of dancing driftwood caught his attention and his eyes followed it down the current. How slowly it appeared to move! What a sluggish stream!

He closed his eyes in order to fix his last thoughts upon his wife and children. The water, touched to gold by the early sun, the brooding mists under the banks at some distance down the stream, the fort, the soldiers, the piece of drift—all had distracted him. And now he became conscious of a new disturbance. Striking through the thought of his dear ones was sound which he could neither ignore nor understand, a sharp, distinct, metallic percussion like the stroke of a blacksmith's hammer upon the anvil; it had the same ringing quality. He wondered what it was, and whether immeasurably distant or nearby—it seemed both. Its recurrence was regular, but as slow as the tolling of a death knell. He awaited each new stroke with impatience and—he knew not why— apprehension. The intervals of silence grew progressively longer; the delays became maddening. With their greater infrequency the sounds increased in strength and

sharpness.They hurt his ear like the trust of a knife; he feared he would shriek.What he heard was the ticking of his watch.

He unclosed his eyes and saw again the water below him. “If I could free my hands,” he thought, “I might throw off the noose and spring into the stream. By diving I could evade the bullets and, swimming vigorously, reach the bank, take to the woods and get away home. My home, thank God, is as yet outside their lines; my wife and little ones are still beyond the invader’s farthest advance.”

As these thoughts, which have here to be set down in words, were flashed into the doomed man’s brain rather than evolved from it the captain nodded to the sergeant.The sergeant stepped aside.

II

PEYTON Farquhar was a well to do planter, of an old and highly respected Alabama family. Being a slave owner and like other slave owners a politician, he was naturallyan original secessionist and ardently devoted to the Southern cause. Circumstances of animperious nature, which it is unnecessary to relate here, had prevented him from taking service with that gallant army which had fought the disastrous campaigns ending with the fall of Corinth, and he chafed under the inglorious restraint, longing for the release of his energies, the larger life of the soldier, the opportunity for distinction.That opportunity, he felt, would come, as it comes to all in wartime. Meanwhile he did what hecould. No service was too humble for him to perform in the aid of the South, no adventure to perilous for him to undertake if consistent with the character of a civilian who was at heart a soldier, and who in good faith and without too much qualification as sented to at least a part of the frankly villainous dictum that all is fair in love and war.

One evening while Farquhar and his wife were sitting on a rustic bench near the entrance to his grounds, a gray-clad soldier rode up to the gate and asked for a drink of water. Mrs. Farquhar was only too happy to serve him with her own white hands.While she was fetching the water her husband approached the dusty horse man and inquired eagerly for news from the front.

“The Yanks are repairing the railroads,” said the man, “and are getting ready for another advance. They have reached the Owl Creek bridge, put it in order and built a stockade on the north bank. The commandant has issued an order, which is posted everywhere, declaring that any civilian caught interfering with the railroad, its bridges, tunnels, or trains will be summarily hanged. I saw the order.”

"How far is it to the Owl Creek bridge?" Farquhar asked. "About thirty miles."

"Is there no force on this side of the creek?"

"Only a picket post half a mile out, on the railroad, and a single sentinel at this end of the bridge."

"Suppose a man — a civilian and student of hanging—should elude the picket post and perhaps get the better of the sentinel,"said Farquhar, smiling,"what could he accomplish?"

The soldier reflected. "I was there a month ago," he replied. "I observed that the flood of last winter had lodged a great quantity of driftwood against the wooden pier at this end of the bridge. It is now dry and would burn like tinder."

The lady had now brought the water, which the soldier drank. He thanked her ceremoniously, bowed to her husband and rode away.An hour later, after nightfall, he repassed the plantation, going northward in the direction from which he had come. He was a Federal scout.

III

AS Peyton Farquhar fell straight downward through the bridge he lost consciousness and was as one already dead. From this state he was awakened— ages later, it seemed to him — by the pain of a sharp pressure upon his throat, followed by a sense of suffocation. Keen, poignant agonies seemed to shoot from his neck downward through every fiber of his body and limbs.These pains appeared to flash along well defined lines of ramification and to beat with an inconceivably rapid periodicity. They seemed like streams of pulsating fire heating him to an intolerable temperature. As to his head, he was conscious of nothing but a feeling of fullness—of congestion. These sensations were unaccompanied by thought. The intellectual part of his nature was already effaced; he had power only to feel, and feeling was torment. He was conscious of motion. Encompassed in a luminous cloud, of which he was now merely the fiery heart, without material substance, he swung through unthinkable arcs of oscillation, like a vast pendulum. Then all at once, with terrible suddenness, the light about him shot upward with the noise of a loud splash; a frightful roaring was in his ears, and all was cold and dark. The power of thought was restored; he knew that the rope had broken and he had fallen into the stream. There was no additional strangulation; the noose about his neck was already suffocating him and kept the water from his lungs. To die of hanging at the bottom of a river!—the idea seemed to him ludicrous. He opened his eyes in the darkness and saw above him a gleam of light,

but how distant, how inaccessible! He was still sinking, for the light became fainter and fainter until it was a mere glimmer.Then it began to grow and brighten, and he knew that he was rising to ward the surface—knew it with reluctance, for he was now very comfortable. “To be hanged and drowned,” he thought,“that is not so bad; but I do not wish to be shot. No;I will not be shot; that is not fair.”

He was not conscious of an effort, but a sharp pain in his wrist apprised him that he was trying to free his hands. He gave the struggle his attention, as an idler might observe the feat of a juggler, without interest in the outcome.What splendid effort!—what magnificent, what superhuman strength! Ah, that was a fine endeavor! Bravo! The cord fell away; his arms parted and floated upward, the hands dimly seen on each side in the growing light. He watched them with a new interest as first one and then the other pounced upon the noose at his neck. They tore it away and thrust it fiercely aside, its undulations resembling those of a water snake.“Put it back,put it back!” He though the shouted these words to his hands, for the undoing of the noose had been succeeded by the direst pang that he had yet experienced. His neck ached horribly; his brain was on fire, his heart, which had been fluttering faintly, gave a great leap, trying to force itself out at his mouth. His whole body was racked and wrenched with an insupportable anguish! But his disobedient hands gave no heed to the command. They beat the water vigorously with quick, downward strokes,forcing him to the surface. He felt his head emerge; his eyes were blinded by the sunlight; his chest expanded convulsively, and with a supreme and crowning agony his lungs engulfed a great draught of air, which instantly he expelled in a shriek!

He was now in full possession of his physical senses.They were, indeed, preternaturally keen and alert. Something in the awful disturbance of his organic system had so exalted and refined them that they made record of things never before perceived. He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf— he saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant bodied flies, the gray spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass.The humming of the gnats that danced above the eddies of the stream, the beating of the dragon flies’wings, the strokes of the water spiders’ legs, like oars which had lifted their boat—all these made audible music. A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water.

He had come to the surface facing down the stream; in a moment the visible world seemed to wheel slowly round, himself the pivotal point,and he saw the bridge, the fort,

the soldiers upon the bridge, the captain, the sergeant, the two privates, his executioners. They were in silhouette against the blue sky. They shouted and gesticulated, pointing at him. The captain had drawn his pistol, but did not fire; the others were unarmed. Their movements were grotesque and horrible, their forms gigantic.

Suddenly he heard a sharp report and something struck the water smartly within a few inches of his head, spattering his face with spray. He heard a second report, and saw one of the sentinels with his rifle at his shoulder, a light cloud of blue smoke rising from the muzzle. The man in the water saw the eye of the man on the bridge gazing into his own through the sights of the rifle. He observed that it was a gray eye and remembered having read that gray eyes were keenest, and that all famous marksmen had them. Nevertheless, this one had missed.

A counter-swirl had caught Farquhar and turned him half round; he was again looking at the forest on the bank opposite the fort. The sound of a clear, high voice in a monotonous singsong now rang out behind him and came across the water with a distinctness that pierced and subdued all other sounds, even the beating of the ripples in his ears.Although no soldier, he had frequented camps enough to know the dread significance of that deliberate, drawling, aspirated chant; the lieutenant on shore was taking a part in the morning's work. How coldly and pitilessly—with what an even, calm intonation, presaging, an denforcing tranquility in the men—with what accurately measured interval fell those cruel words:

"Company!...Attention!...Shoulder arms!...Ready!...Aim!...Fire!"

Farquhar dived — dived as deeply as he could.The water roared in his ears like the voice of Niagara, yet he heard the dull thunder of the volley and, rising again toward the surface, met shining bits of metal, singularly flattened, oscillating slowly down ward. Some of them touched him on the face and hands, then fell away, continuing their descent. One lodged between his collar and neck; it was uncomfortably warm and he snatched it out.

As he rose to the surface, gasping for breath, he saw that he had been a long time under water; he was perceptibly farther downstream—nearer to safety.The soldiers had almost finished reloading; the metal ramrods flashed all at once in the sunshine as they were drawn from the barrels, turned in the air, and thrust into their sockets.The two sentinels fired again, independently and ineffectually.

The hunted man saw all this over his shoulder; he was now swimming vigorously with the current. His brain was as energetic as his arms and legs; he thought with the rapidity of lightning:

“The officer,” he reasoned,“will not make that martinet’s error a second time. It is as easy to dodge a volley as a single shot. He has probably already given the command to fire at will. God help me, I cannot dodge them all!”

An appalling splash within two yards of him was followed by aloud, rushing sound, diminuendo, which seemed to travel back through the air to the fort and died in an explosion which stirred the very river to its deeps! A rising sheet of water curve dover him, fell down upon him, blinded him, strangled him! The cannon had taken an hand in the game. As he shook his head free from the commotion of the smitten water he heard the deflected shot humming through the air ahead, and in an instant it was cracking and smashing the branches in the forest beyond.

“They will not do that again,” he thought; “the next time they will use a charge of grape. I must keep my eye upon the gun; the smoke will apprise me—the report arrives too late; it lags behind the missile. That is a good gun.”

Suddenly he felt himself whirled round and round—spinning like a top. The water, the banks, the forests, the now distant bridge, fort and men, all were commingled and blurred. Objects were represented by their colors only; circular horizontal streaks of color— that was all he saw. He had been caught in a vortex and was being whirled on with a velocity of advance and gyration that made him giddy and sick. In few moments he was flung upon the gravel at the foot of the left bank of the stream—the southern bank—and behind a projecting point which concealed him from his enemies. The sudden arrest of his motion, the abrasion of one of his hands on the gravel, restored him, and he wept with delight. He dug his fingers into the sand, threw it over himself in handfuls and audibly blessed it. It looked like diamonds, rubies, emeralds; he could think of nothing beautiful which it did not resemble. The trees upon the bank were giant garden plants; he noted a definite order in their arrangement, inhaled the fragrance of their blooms.A strange roseate light shone through the spaces among their trunk sand the wind made in their branches the music of Aeolian harps. He had not wish to perfect his escape—he was content to remain in that enchanting spot until retaken.

A whiz and a rattle of grapeshot among the branches high above his head roused him from his dream. The baffled cannoneer had fired him a random farewell. He sprang to his feet, rushed up the sloping bank, and plunged into the forest.

All that day he traveled, laying his course by the rounding sun. The forest seemed interminable; nowhere did he discover a break in it, not even a woodman’s road. He had not known that he lived in so wild a region. There was something uncanny in the revelation.

By nightfall he was fatigued, footsore, famished. The thought of his wife and children urged him on. At last he found a road which led him in what he knew to be the right direction. It was as wide and straight as a city street, yet it seemed untraveled. No fields bordered it, no dwelling anywhere. Not so much as the barking of a dog suggested human habitation.The black bodies of the trees formed a straight wall on both sides, terminating on the horizon in a point, like a diagram in a lesson in perspective. Overhead, as he looked up throught his rift in the wood, shone great golden stars looking unfamiliar and grouped in strange constellations.He was sure they were arranged in some order which had a secret and malign significance. The wood one it her side was full of singular noises, among which—once, twice, and again—he distinctly heard whispers in an unknown tongue.

His neck was in pain and lifting his hand to it found it horribly swollen. He knew that it had a circle of black where the rope had bruised it. His eyes felt congested; he could no longer close them. His tongue was swollen with thirst; he relieved its fever by thrusting it forward from between his teeth into the cold air. How softly the turf had carpeted the untraveled avenue—he could no longer feel the roadway beneath his feet!

Doubtless, despite his suffering, he had fallen asleep while walking, for now he sees another scene —perhaps he has merely recovered from a delirium. He stands at the gate of his own home. All is as he left it, and all bright and beautiful in the morning sunshine. He must have traveled the entire night. As he pushes open the gate and passes up the wide white walk, he sees a flutter of female garments; his wife, looking fresh and cool and sweet, steps down from the veranda to meet him. At the bottom of the steps she stands waiting, with a smile of ineffable joy, an attitude of matchless grace and dignity. Ah, how beautiful she is! He springs forwards with extended arms. As he is about to clasp her he feels a stunning blow upon the back of the neck; a blinding white light blazes all about him with a sound like the shock of a cannon — then all is darkness and silence!

Peyton Farquhar was dead; his body, with a broken neck, swung gently from side to side beneath the timbers of the Owl Creek bridge.