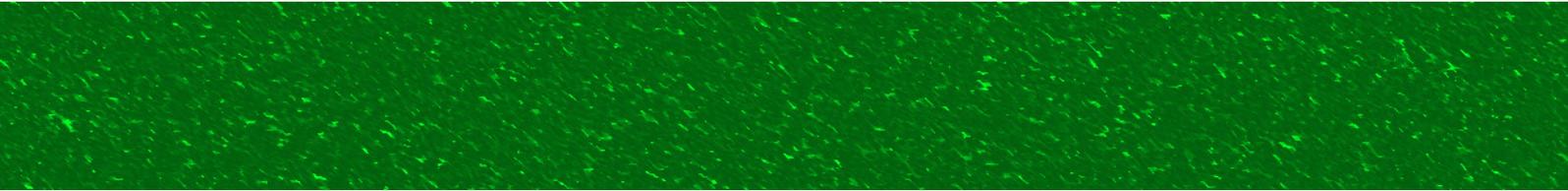


DEPOIMENTOS



Odiseo: A Lipogramatic Version of James Joyce's Ulysses

Marcelo Zabaloy¹

The aim of this translation was to demonstrate that even though the letter A is the most recurrent in the Spanish language, it is not impossible to write a sensible and meaningful piece of text, including a short story and a rather complex novel, without it at all. It's much harder to do so without the letter E. Names have been adapted to follow the rule and, when necessary, a footnote has been placed with instructions on how to replace that vowel with the first letter of the alphabet. Places – streets, districts, towns, and cities – were replaced by the nearest spots available without the forbidden letter. Similar criteria have been adapted regarding monuments and buildings. The re-translation of *Ulysses* as a lipogram follows the original Shakespeare and Company edition published in Paris, by Sylvia Beach, in 1922. Where errata were obvious, consultations were made with the following editions: The Modern Library (1934), The Limited Editions Club (1935), the Gabler Edition (1986) and the French edition of La Maison des Amis des Livres (1929). The whole revision was done by Professor Eugenio Conchez, professor of English Literature at Universidad Nacional de La Pampa.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a lipogram is “a composition from which the writer rejects all words that contain a certain letter or letters”. That said, I will try to explain the reason why I ended up rewriting my translation of *Ulysses* into Spanish without using the first letter of the alphabet.

I am an Argentine amateur translator who, one day, started reading *Ulysses* in English. It was back in 2004. For my better understanding of the novel, I started to translate one paragraph, the beautiful comparison that Bloom makes between women and the moon. The pleasure of that afternoon – because it took me almost the entire afternoon to polish it up – was such that I couldn't stop. I kept on translating until the end of “Ithaca” and started with episode one.

As I worked as an independent Information Technology contractor, it took me four years to finish the first draft of the translation. In 2010 I finally signed a contract

¹ Marcelo Zabaloy is an Argentinian translator who translated James Joyce's *Ulysses* (El Cuenco de Plata, Buenos Aires, 2015) and *Finnegans Wake* (El Cuenco de Plata, Buenos Aires, 2016) into Spanish. His translation of *Finnegans Wake* remains the first and only complete and unabridged Spanish version of *The Wake* and it has the particularity of following the original 1939 Faber and Faber edition page by page. He went on to re-translate *Ulysses* as a lipogram, not using the most recurrent letter in the Spanish language, the A. It will be published in 2022 as *Odiseo*.

with El Cuenco de Plata, a publishing house in Buenos Aires, and the first edition of my translation appeared on 1 April 2015.

After those wonderful years translating *Ulysses*, I found myself empty. I ought to do something challenging. What was that *Finnegans Wake* thing about? I'd give it a try. So, I read as far as page 240 and decided that reading it without at the same time translating it was out of discussion. I thought it would be the only way to grasp a bit of meaning, if any, and enjoy the reading. Now the whole process took me seven years, from 2009 to 2016. Again, El Cuenco de Plata published the, by then and so far (July 2021), only unabridged Spanish version of *Finnegans Wake*.

“What will I do now?”, I asked myself. My option was to reread a very strange novel by Georges Perec, one of my favourite writers, called *La Disparition*. It is a lipogram in E. It's not an easy job to write in French without the letter E – think of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* –, but Perec did it. Just for the sake of fun I started translating *La Disparition* into Spanish to see how hard it was to write a lipogram in E. I gained another year of extreme pleasure. But the right holders of Georges Perec's *La Disparition* wouldn't consider my application on the grounds that the real difficulty in Spanish resided in writing without the letter A, not the E. This novel, translated by a team formed by Marisol Arbués, Mercè Burrel, Marc Parayre, Hermes Salceda and Regina Vega, was published in the 1990s by Anagrama as a lipogram in A under the title of *El Secuestro*. They received the Stendhal Award in 1998. The English version is a lipogram in E, with the title *A Void*.

This refusal of my translation was frustrating as it meant that the novel as Georges Perec wrote it, without E, would never and probably will never be, published. But I had to go on and, therefore, started translating it once more, this time as a lipogram in A, just to see how difficult it was. If the E-less version took me one year, the A-less one was finished in six months. Someday, somehow, and somewhere, somebody will want to publish these two versions of Georges Perec's great novel, *La Disparition*.

But what is the connection, if any, between James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Georges Perec? Just have a look at this:

...la maison et ses dépendances comprenant un salon avec baywindow (ogives à double lancette), y compris le thermomètre, un petit salon, 4 chambres à coucher, 2 chambres de domestiques, 1 cuisine carrelée avec fourneau et office, un hall avec placards à linge, et un dispositif de rayons de bibliothèque en chêne teinté contenant l'Encyclopedia Britannica et le New Century Dictionary, des panoplies d'anciennes armes médiévales et orientales, un gong pour les repas, une lampe d'albâtre, une jardinière suspendue, un

*appareil téléphonique en ébonite avec l'annuaire à côté, un tapis Axminster de haute laine à fond crème et bordure treillissée, une table à jouer la mouche avec pied central à griffes, une cheminée avec garniture en cuivre massif, et sur la cheminée, une pendule de précision en ormlu, mouvement garanti avec carillon de Westminster, un baromètre-hygromètre, des canapés confortables et des coins recouverts en peluche rubis avec d'excellents ressorts et un centre dans lequel on enfonce, un paravent japonais à trois panneaux et des crachoirs (style des grands clubs, beau cuir rouge-vin qui retrouve son brillant avec un minimum de peine par l'emploi d'huile de lin et de vinaigre), un lustre central à chandeliers avec des pendeloques en forme de prismes pyramidaux, un perchoir en bois courbe et un perroquet assez apprivoisé pour se percher sur un doigt (répertoire expurgé)... (Georges Perec, *La vie mode d'emploi*).*

So, there you have sleepy Bloom's ideal country house of "Ithaca". I know, this has nothing to do with a lipogram. Furthermore, it is written in French. But Georges Perec wrote a lipogramatic novel and he loved Joyce's works so much as to cut out (saying thank you at the end of the book with a list of borrowings) a beautiful paragraph from *Ulysses* and paste it in *La vie mode d'emploi*. With that in mind and to *avoid the void* I decided to reopen my first episode of *Ulysses* in Spanish and replace every single word with an A for an equivalent word without an A.

The covid-19 paralysis helped me a lot as I had all the time I needed for my new project. In one year, I completed the 18 episodes.

Objections: What are you doing, for example, with Paris, Shakespeare, Parnell, Aristotle, Dame Street, etc.

Just a few glimpses of what I call "My Solutions": Ireland is Eire and/or Erin. Paris could be Clichy or Boul'Mich, Parnell could be Pornell (with a footnote requiring to kindly replace O, where O was neither O, E, I, nor U). The French language, where named, would become Molière's lexicon. Shakespeare would not be offended if somebody like me renamed him as Shekspierre or renamed his son Hamnet as Homnet or Hamlet as Homlet, would he? Or his hated brother Richard receiving the nickname Richie or Dick. Would it be a crime to replace Dame Street for Crow Street, being the latter just a few meters parallel to the former?

With these sorts of licenses, which I took with the permission of nobody, my lipogramatic version of *Ulysses*, entitled *Odiseo*, will be published by my own publishing house, HCE. It will be available for 2-2-22.

