

TRANSLATING *MONSTERS*

an almost daily journal

By *Érico Assis*

Journal: April to July 2021

Addendum: Monday, August 15, 2022

Journal: April to July 2021

Tuesday, April 27, 2021

This is my first journaling day for this translation project: Barry Windsor-Smith's *Monsters*¹, which I'm translating into the Portuguese for the Brazilian publisher Todavia. Yesterday I got the green light from TOLEDO to start on this diary.

Actually, I started this translation last week. Today I'm on page 93. It's still early in the process, since it's a (pardon the pun) monstrous book. It's a 370-page graphic novel, dialogue-thick, and it's got some other intricacies. I'll talk about all of them over the course of this journal. Maybe I'll also go back to that first week on it.

As I was saying, today I've started on page 93 and went up to 121. I started on a high-speed car chase scene – military jeeps, actually – with machine gun fire roaring. A lot of floating sound effects (we use the term “onomatopoeia” in Brazil) and the often hard translator's decisions about which of these effects I *should* translate, which of these I *can* translate, and which of these I should *leave as is*.

There are technical issues involved: I still don't know if these effects were applied digitally to the comics page and, if so, can be easily edited; or if they were drawn along with the rest of the page, which will be a severe hindrance to the translation letterer. It's always better to let onomatopoeia be as it is, because many artists – and BWS is surely one of them – layout their page using this special text as a composition element. But then, some of those are incomprehensible for the Brazilian reader. Screams, for instance, are “EEEEEE”, which a Brazilian reader reads as “EHHHH” or the “e” in “error”; so it “sounds” better if it's translated as “AHHHH” or some equivalent.

I'll make most of the decisions regarding sound effects during the second draft stage. I hope I have this information on digital-or-drawn by then. But I'm betting they are all drawn on the actual page...



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Monsters, page 91.

From the car chase scene we jump to some quiet scenes and then intense conversation. Long, intersecting, cut-up dialogues, people talking over one another. Some soldier lingo, some theology. BWS depicts one of these talks, the longest one – two characters talking from page 114 to 121 – during a slowly intensifying blizzard. Snowflakes get heavier and more pervasive over eight pages, contrasting with the (many) speech balloons. I keep thinking about the interview in which BWS says he does not like to draw. Could he be lying?

(I'll get back to this interview in future entries.)

Today I translated 28 pages, typed 15,745 valid keystrokes. A nice chunk of my afternoon. Didn't translate a military command: "Hupp, two, hey!". Didn't find anything about it on initial research.

Thursday, April 29

I did not work on *Monsters* yesterday. It's normal for me as a full-time translator: I don't work on one project at a time, and some days are devoted to other concurrent projects. Since my early years as a translator, I've been working on concurrent projects. I know of some other literature and comics translation professionals who conduct their business as I do.

At the moment I'm working on three projects: a novel by a Swedish author, called *Glacier* (translated from English); the second volume of Yuval Noah Harari's best-seller *Sapiens* comic adaptation; and an ongoing large project of translating all of Charles

Schulz' *Peanuts* Sunday strips for a 60-volume collection. For the latter, I have already translated half of the volumes. It's an 18-month long project.

Since the last time I opened the *Monsters* translation file, I've worked on the final draft of 52 *Peanuts* strips and finished selecting 160 daily strips that will be part of a special volume (all of them featuring Snoopy as "the World Famous Author"); I've translated some 30 pages of *Glacier*; and I've translated some 40 pages of *Sapiens*. I've also finished my online translation workshop for LabPub – the last class of the second edition was on Tuesday night – and interviewed two cartoonists for my Friday column on a website called *Omelete*.

In *Monsters* pages today, the plot goes back to 1949, when the main character is a child and his father is finally coming back from World War II. Something held his father back in Europe for years after the actual end of the war. The characters speak some "hillbilly English", though it's not the stereotypical Southern accent of some comics or film productions. The story is set in a small town in Ohio, which is Northeast USA. Is it a "hillbilly state"?

It's not easy to translate "hillbilliese". Not only because I shouldn't use a typical "Brazilian hillbilliese", but also because they love to use "damned" or "goddamn" and we don't use the same structure for swearing in Brazilian Portuguese. There's another layer of word-wrangling to make sure these imprecations sound like equivalent cursing.



Monsters, detail from page 135.

I may be influenced by my knowledge of this comic production, but I feel there are some pages that were drawn many years apart – *Monsters* was produced roughly between 1984 and 2019. There's a passage that I'm sure it's from the 1980s, since it's basically the same plot Marvel Comics used in a Hulk comic (I'll talk more about this plagiarism issue in a future entry). These backstage things are heightened by the [YouTube interview with BWS](#) I watched some days ago.

Oh, and that same interview led me to contact some eight cartoonists and ask them if they don't feel any pleasure in drawing comics, as BWS says he does not. I'll collect all answers in my monthly column for *Blog da Companhia*.

In today's *Monsters* pages, one of the characters writes a journal. I liked the parallels.

Thirty pages translated on first draft mode, up to page 151. Seventeen thousand keystrokes in the evening.

Friday, April 30

Before starting today's translation session, I read Paul Gravett's review of *Monsters*, published in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Gravett is one of the world's most renowned comics critics and historians, maybe the greatest living one.

There's one thing that Gravett underlines that speaks directly to my work as a translator. He says BWS is "Pynchonesque" on the way he renders dialogue. I never read much Thomas Pynchon, but I believe he's referring to intersecting, colloquial, "messy" talking, or trying to depict realist life conversation. I considered BWS was aiming for that, and it's nice to see another reader corroborating that it's an important stylistic approach. This will be important for some translation decisions.

Yesterday I read another online review, from the *A.V. Club website*, that also underlines how BWS sound effects constitute text aggregates that may work as images. It adds to my worries about translating onomatopoeia. For most of them, I'm just copying the words to the document and attaching a note that says "keep it as is", or, in Portuguese, "manter".

Both reviews spoiled some plot points. I still have not read the whole book. I rarely do when I'm translating first draft. But I can live with some spoilers.

There's a background character called Eileen, the main character's aunt, who sometimes is nicknamed "Ei". In Portuguese, that's the word for "Hey!". I'm thinking of changing her nickname. Maybe it should be "Lin". Another thing to think through till second draft.

From page 155: *It's not as if T. was a tank commander or anything, he was just a German translator. How much awfulness could he have been a party to if he was just a translator?*

Thirty-one translated pages, up to 182. Twenty thousand keystrokes, took me almost all of the afternoon. The typing was greater because many of the pages were diary entries.



Monsters, page 155.

Monday, May 3

There are many pages in *Monsters* with unusual text density for present day comics. Mainstream comics sometimes had this much text up to the 1970s – unnecessary copy, descriptions of things you could see for yourself in the drawings – but maybe not with these speech balloon masses:



Monsters, page 186.

It's about the colloquial aspect, or mumbling, some critics have commented upon (see last entry). There are many superfluous enunciations, from an informative or plot standpoint, but they contribute to the "talkiness" aspect that BWS seems to aim for. A lot of "uh" ("hã" in Portuguese), many unfinished phrases, a convoluted way of getting to the point. It's a stylistic choice the translation should aim to convey.

These varying page densities are my excuse for championing keystroke-rates, instead of page-rates, for comic translators instead. Most comic publishers in Brazil – and abroad, as I'm told – prefer paying a page rate for translators. It's easier to get a quote, after all: translating the 100-page book at R\$ 10/page will cost the publisher R\$ 1000 and that's it. I advocate, whenever I am able to, a rate for 2.000 keystrokes – that's the usual for prose translation (2000 keystrokes is a *lauda*, an old newspaper term, equivalent to one typed-up page in typewriters). I believe it's fairer for the translator and for the publisher: text-dense comics – and, therefore, more work-intensive comics – should be better paid in translation than comics that are text-light. Todavía, thankfully, agreed to pay my *Monsters* translation by keystrokes.

There's one mention of carbon copy in the story and I stopped to check if this technology existed in 1949. It did. It's just that sometimes I think BWS did not research some aspects, like cars, clothing, weaponry, to be contemporaneous to the action. I think the English speech patterns are not from the 1940s. Even if I'm right, he's not the first author to make characters speak contemporarily in stories set in the past, and that's not a problem.

I'm officially on the second half of my first draft. I translated up to page 200. Got to almost 14 thousand keystrokes today.

Thursday, May 6

I wanted to get back to *Monsters* today after three days of not touching it, but it was kind of a messy day, mainly due to a lot of other jobs with more pressing deadlines.

Got to work on 14 and a half pages, though. Up to 215. Lots of chopped-up dialogue between Janet Bailey and police officer Jack Powell.

One of the more pressing things was checking a week's worth of comics news to fuel myself for tomorrow's Omelete column. Found a new BWS interview, [on NPR](#). With a very, very interesting tidbit:

The Monster was never fully verbal. At first, I had him grunting in response to others. The grunts stayed in the [speech] balloons on the artwork for many years, and I grew increasingly uncomfortable with the comic-booky-ness of it all. Due to the ever-lengthening time in production, the original art paper turned a dingy yellow and the glue holding the balloons and captions atrophied to the point where all the paste-ups fell off hundreds and hundreds of pages. Not much good came of this except my noticing that, with the "grunt" balloon [having] fallen to the floor, a panel of the Monster that I [had] never [found convincing] looked just fine as a silent shot.

And that's why the central Monster in *Monsters* does not talk.

Besides that, now I understand that probably all of the balloons, captions and onomatopoeia in *Monsters* are physically glued to the page, and not added, as most comics do nowadays, on a Photoshop or Illustrator layer. This will be an extra difficulty for the translation letterer. And for me, since I won't be free to ask for a bigger balloon to accommodate extensive dialogue – a thing that would be easy to do with an editable layer, but very time-consuming for the letterer when there's none – nor to ask for most of the onomatopoeia to be translated.

Monday, May 10

Today, my translation was basically centered on this:



This gun had already appeared before in the story, but I got to a point where it's become part of a two-page dialogue. Bobby gets one of those as a gift from Officer Powell and then Janet, Bobby's mom, has a bit of an argument with Powell about the toy gun. Not because it may be dangerous or send the wrong message to get a gun to a kid, apparently, but because she thinks a Spud Gun is a pistol to shoot *at potatoes*, not to *shoot (bits of) potatoes*.

The translation problem is I that I don't know if this toy was ever a *thing* in Brazil. If it *wasn't*, the better for me: I can call it any way I want, maybe add some lines to explain it – its workings are part of the dialogue scene, so I wouldn't have to add much. If it was a children's toy at any time in Brazil, or if there was anything like it, then I should get the right reference for the name it was marketed as in here. Google didn't help me find that. My translator friends don't know anything about it either. I'm trying Twitter and a friend who's into guns. Stay tuned.

(There's also a reference to a *pea-shooter* when Powell is trying to explain the *spud gun* to Janet. We normally use a Native Brazilian word for pea-shooter in Brazil: *zarabatana*. But, in this case, I have to mention peas, so I'm still working on what to call that. I think we are not used to playing with peas, potatoes, or food in general in Brazil due to our history of famine.)

I'm more than halfway through the book, but it's still a long way to go. Every time I get a month or so into a translation job I feel a kind of *translation fatigue*. It's happening with *Monsters* – every page I finish is an excuse to check social media, e-mail, any small thing I can procrastinate with. Maybe I'm just tired of this segment about Janet and Officer Powell's will-they-or-won't-they routine. (And I know they won't.)

Nineteen text-heavy pages today, or so it felt. Sixteen thousand keystrokes. A hundred and forty pages to go on this first draft...

Wednesday, May 12

Things finally moved along in the plot. According to the last BWS interview I read, the NPR one, I just translated the centerpiece scene, the one around which *Monsters* was developed: the Thanksgiving dinner scene.

I don't know how much I'll spoil the book for people who are yet to read it, but I can only say the scene ends with four people shot dead.

A lot of talking, a lot of onomatopoeia, people shouting, people talking softly, people speaking in other languages, a lot of bold and italics. It's crazy gymnastics for the fingers. One of these pages:

P. 253

**'allo, police! [manter]
phil! tom!**

é uma **emergência?** [menor]
la police, 'sil vous plaît! [manter]
não, isso não **pode!**
 vou transferir, senhora. [menor]
tom!
 obricada, **depressa!**
 delegacia, balcão. [menor]

sim, eu precisa vocês rápido!
 qual é a **situação,** senhora? [menor]
mon mari se bat contre-- [manter]
 pode repetir, senhora? [menor]
 é tudo culpa **minha!**

meu **marrí** está **brigando!**
então tá, tom...
 onde a senhora está?
 perdão pelo minha **língua,** pode **ripitir,** por favorr?
você pegou aparto...
eu vou te estourar, pau d'água filho da puta!

e vai ser pela minha irmãzinha!

de onde a senhora está **chamando?** [menor]
 je ne **sais pas la rue!** [manter]
 {meu **deus!**}
 non, je **veux dire...** [manter]
onde? qual **casa?** [menor]
bailey! tom bailey! [manter]
 enviaremos **imediatamente,** senhora.

seu metido...
arrogante...

The [manter] marks indicate a speech should be left as is – the character who speaks in French will still talk French in my translation. The [menor] marks indicate text should be written on a smaller than standard font. These notations help the letterer. He or she will evidently have access to the original pages and will be able to see the type characteristics for each balloon. But it always helpful to note these on the translation document, both for the letterer and for proof-readers, editors and so on.

Twenty-seven pages, only thirteen thousand keystrokes, as some of the pages are speechless.

Yesterday and today I also got to write and deliver a piece directly related to BWS and *Monsters* for Blog da Companhia, a publishing house blog where I keep a monthly column about comics. Based on BWS statement about comics being a “terribly hard job” and not finding any joy on making comics, I interviewed nine creators with one question only: *Is drawing comics joyful for you?* Seven of them are Brazilian creators I have easy access to; one of them is Emil Ferris, an American artist whose work I

translated and who I got to interview some months ago; and the last one was Walt Simonson, a veteran creator who was cited by name by BWS as a colleague who exudes joy when talking about creating comics. “That’s when he loses me”, BWS says in that interview.

“Each artist has to find their own way to what they're trying to achieve”, Simonson told me. “Whatever it is that Barry does or needs to reach his goal, he produces brilliant work. And that benefits all of us who love his stories and art.”

[My article is here, in Portuguese.](#)

Thursday, May 13

People who never translated comics may think a lot about how a comic translator works if he or she is not able to work *in* the comic’s page itself. We work with Microsoft Word, and we deliver a text document to the editor. This text document will be worked on by the editor themselves and by proofreaders before reaching a letterer, who will then apply this text to the comic page *per se*.

The technical aspects of my work are quite simple. We, translators, create a kind of script for the letterer. And we don’t have to point each panel, each character’s turn of speech. We just note the page and then all the writing occurrences in it, in reading order, as you can see in yesterday’s entry.

Reading order is usually very clear. There’s an art to it, called balloon placement, that guides your eye seamlessly through the page. There are lettering professionals who deal exclusively with lettering, but I believe BWS did it by himself on *Monsters*. And he does it beautifully, even when he crams the page with balloons.

Except when he does not. Well, when he *purposefully* does not.



Monsters, detail from page 262 with my markings.

This is an excerpt from page 262. Each phrase evokes a dialogue from previous scenes, and the balloons are intentionally all around, as if all of them should be read at once. That’s a rare (very rare) occasion when I have to point out to the letterer in my translation document which balloon I’m referring to on my translation document. I drew

those crude numbers with my mouse, so please don't criticize my hand drawing.

Here's an excerpt from the translation document:

1 o que **há**, senhor – algo de **errado**?
2 por que ele não **volta pra casa** como os outros?
3 ele está só um pouquinho **agitado**
4 tipo o quê?
5 esse é meu filho **bobby**
6 **eileen** ronsadt é **irmã** do tom
7 gentil guarda jack
8 o senhor é do **governo**, sr. powell.
9 eu ficaria **perdida** sem você, jack
10 eu não devia ficar no **escuro**
11 a que **você mandou** – eu comi no **ônibus**
12 eu **sei** que você não é major-coronel
13 eu amei **cada minuto**, sinceramente
14 eu estava tendo um **sonho ruim**
15 eu não quero de **deixar**, jack, mas eu tenho que **voltar pro bobby**
16 você ainda não me **contou** o que você **disse**
17 essas mulheres **também** estão esperando os **maridos**?

I didn't make a lot of progress today: only nine pages, 5.700 keystrokes. That page 263 took me a while, though.

Oh, I also read *The Guardian's review of Monsters*. "Perhaps inevitably, given its long gestation period and ambitious scope, Monsters can feel disjointed. Its mix of sci-fi, body horror, fateful coincidences, psychic powers and family drama isn't always coherent; at times the dialogue falls flat." There are some stabs at the "Magic Negro" trope and on the clichéd Nazi with a claw-hand, but it's mostly positive. People are in awe of BWS art. Which reminds me I've yet to see it in paper. It must be a whole other experience than reading it on a PDF as I'm doing.

Monday, May 17

Today I:

- Made the last check on the translation a French comic I did with a friend (he did most of it) and sent it to the publisher;
- Translated some 40 or 50 Peanuts strips;
- Put some touches on a piece I'm writing for a magazine (and I don't know how to finish it);
- Translated some text snippets I'm supposed to fill in on a 700-page book translation because the translator did not have the correct PDF when she worked on it, and she can't work on it right now (this is one of the strangest translation projects I've ever

been involved with);
– translated part of a NYT article for a friend;

And then, by 5pm, I finally got to *Monsters*.

Not a lot to report today, besides a lot of finger-exercising: lots of font size marks, lots of bolds and italics.

Actually, there's one thing I kept thinking while translating today's pages, which is not exactly *my* problem. The scene is set in Germany, at the very end of World War II, and some dialogue is written in German. Some of it is not translated, but some of it is translated right below, in another speech balloon. There's a story-wise explanation for this: one of the point-of-view characters is a G.I. interpreter, so it's like we are hearing him translate it. A small sample:



Monsters, page 303.

My question is: how will the German edition deal with this? Surely you can make a note at the beginning of the scene, like "Dialogues originally in German". But, first, you lose the author's intention for the reader to *not* completely understand it. And you may say that's ok, that's an understandable loss in translation – it happens in movies as well. But then, what will German translators and editors do when they have, like in the sample above, a German speech balloon with an English translation right under it? I don't think there's an easy way of *erasing* the translation balloons – not without having to draw or complete the art of what's beneath them. Maybe ask BWS to redo these pages? Will he do it?

In other news, didn't get any answer about the existence of *spud guns* in Brazil, but someone answered that toy guns like this were called "apache" or "bang bang". That gave me the idea to call the toy gun a "bang bang batata" (bang bang potato, on back translation). It's a nice alliterative name for a toy. (Also, the name of a recipe in Indian cuisine, as a Twitter search tells me.)

It's 8pm now. I've translated 33 pages, 22.5 thousand keystrokes. A lot of those are just German dialogue I copied. Made a note to write about the loooong, Tarantino-like scenes, crammed with dialogue. Maybe I will talk about this next time.

Wednesday, May 19

Nothing much to report today. Completed another 32 pages, but only 13 thousand keystrokes. (There were two completely silent pages, and three or four almost silent ones.) There are less than 40 pages left to finish the translation's first draft. I'm confident it will happen this week.

When I'm getting close to the end, I like to do some things of the back-matter in advance, so that when I "get there" they will be already done. I translated the author's bio and the back cover copy.

Thursday, May 20

Did it. Finished the last 32 pages and I'm done with the first draft of the *Monsters* translation.

The full Word doc is 211 pages, 40k words, 225k keystrokes long. As I said in a previous entry, I'm being paid by *lauda*, which is sort of an equivalent to a full-typed page. A *lauda* is generally 2000 keystrokes long. So *Monsters* would be a 112 *laudas* book. That's the text content for its actual 368 pages.

I usually complete a work in three translation drafts or stages. I will probably let it sleep for some days before I get back to start on the second draft.

There's a new interview with BWS I got to read today, for *The Guardian*. I'm not sure if it should be called an interview, though, since more than half of it is the journalist's views on *Monsters* and his blunt confession that BWS did not answer most of what he asked. As for what he actually answered, the journalist says, "his replies were half the length of my questions."

There are some comparisons to *The Shining*, which I hadn't thought about. It's a nice way to think about the supernatural elements, which bother me a little bit.

Tuesday, June 8

It's been over two weeks since I last opened the *Monsters* translation file. In part, I wanted a breather after finishing the first draft. Generally, a week does the job. But then, I had to, let's say, put out some fires at other translation jobs - including some help with a translation from the same publisher of *Monsters*, which was urgent, and that I could interpret as a free pass to not work on *Monsters* for a while. So, I didn't.

But now it's time to get back to it. I reopened the file, saved it with a new title - ericoassis-tradu-MONSTERS-revis -, magnified it to 200%, double-spaced all of it and opened the original comic (now with a new, definite, finished PDF version) side by side on the other monitor. And started reading everything once more.

(In Brazil, we say "cotejar", which is like comparing, confronting. Collating, maybe?)

Actually, I started on that yesterday, but didn't advance further than 10 pages or so. Today I had some hours to dedicate to the book and got on to page 42. I'm mainly correcting some typos, adding some missed words, some missing orientations (which speech balloon should have smaller font, which sound effect I forgot to translate, or should point out that is not to be translated). I also let some translation indecision for this stage. One of them is "up the pins".



Monsters, detail from page 14.

It looks like some helicopter pilot lingo, but I can't seem to find any sure-fire reference that explains me what "up the pins" means. I've already contacted a pilot school in Brazil, who forwarded my question to a Brazilian pilot who lives in the US, who then forwarded my question to an older pilot – since I had explained this scene is set in 1964 – and no one could answer me what "up the pins" means. I guess I'll have to check with the author.

But, in instances like this one, I prefer to go through all to the end of the translation, gather all my questions, and then send one e-mail only of translation questions. This is just the first one of, I hope, not many. And I always have to cross my fingers and hope that the author (or his publisher) will be kind enough to save some minutes for me, and come up with a reply.

So, as I said, I'm up to page 42 of the comic on draft two. The translation document is 420 pages long and, in this count, I'm on page 55. So I think we have 10 translation days ahead for this stage...

Tuesday, June 9

Managed to work on almost 80 comic pages today on stage two – though a dozen or so of these pages were wordless or almost so. I'm up to page 121. Nice chunk for a day!

The pilot I contacted about "up the pins" (see last entry) was apparently very interested in my question and kept on asking other pilots about it. And googling as well! I believe he made a breakthrough: "up the pins" may not be a helicopter term at all, but a reference to... bowling. It would be something like "let's move on".

Also got back to a question I did not get to solve on first draft: "Hupp, two, hey!", on page 121 (see my first entry on the journal). I checked with a friend who always helps some other translator friends with military lingo, and he gave me a not-so-short-not-so-long story about "hupp" and its many uses among military officers. Another one for the "solved" list.

Tuesday, June 15

It's been difficult getting back to *Monsters* due to pressure on other, time-sensitive translation projects. But then, today, I got to revise 40 pages or so. Nothing extraordinary to report, though.

Wednesday, June 16

Two days in a row, that's a first. Worked on 60 pages, now I'm definitely over halfway through the book in this second translation draft.

Got held up on an expression on page 204, when a military officer says his subordinate shouldn't "go indian" on something. "So going indian on it seems out of line" is the full phrase. It seems to be something like "don't get your panties in a bunch" – the officer is telling his subordinate to not make any fuss about a thing the subordinate was expecting to happen. I can't seem to find any definition of "going indian" or "go indian" that fits this context. The definition I find are derogatory and definitely non-P.C. to native Americans, and I believe BWS is trying to underline this character a foul-mouthed bigoted old-school veteran (the scene is set in 1949). I'm not sure about it, though.

As it happened with "up the pins", some entries ago, that's something I may have to ask the author directly. If I don't get any help from translator friends I reached out to. So far, no one was able to help me...



204 | Barry Windsor-Smith

Monsters, page 204.

Tuesday-Wednesday, June 22 and 23

Went full steam ahead to finish the second draft of the translation and managed to read all of the second half of the book. It's finished. Now, on to the last phase.

This is my usual translation process. First draft is a sort-of speedy translation, with not much in terms of research or dealing with difficult words or phrases. I leave these difficulties to the second draft, when I do a close reading of the translation and check on everything that needs to be checked, whether it's something that has to be coordinated inside the book – like repeated lines or terms – or that needs checking outside the book.

In the first and second drafts, I always have the source text by my side. The PDF is literally open on a second computer monitor (or iPad) adjacent to the monitor in which I'm working on (in Microsoft Word). On the third and final draft, I don't work with the source text, only with the translated text – I reread the revised translation, preferably aloud, and make it fluent in Portuguese. That's what I'll do next week. The stages are progressively less time-consuming, so I hope to finish the last one in two or three chunks/days.

Of interest for this second draft is the revised version of page 262, which I talked about on the May 13 entry. Now, besides the numbered speech balloons, I added references to the pages where each line is previously said, so that I, the proof-reader, editor, and other people who will work on the book can coordinate in case they need to alter the text.



Monsters, detail from page 262 with my markings.

- 1 o que **houve**, senhor... **aconteceu** alguma coisa? [igual p. 180]
- 2 por que ele não pode **voltar pra casa** que nem os outros? [igual p. 181]
- 3 estou só um **pouquinho** confusa. [igual p. 205]
- 4 tipo o quê?
- 5 esse é o meu **filho**, o bobby
- 6 **eileen** ronsadt é **irmã** do tom [igual p. 186]
- 7 guarda amigo jack! [igual p. 189]
- 8 o senhor é do **governo**, sr. powell [igual p. 181 – sem “sr. powell” no original]
- 9 eu estaria **perdida** sem você, jack

- 10 eu não devia ficar **às escuras**. [igual p. 185]
- 11 a **sua**. eu **comi**. no **ônibus**. [igual p. 202]
- 12 eu **sei** que você não é major-coronel
- 13 eu **amei cada minuto!** é **sério...** [igual p. 213]
- 14 eu tive um **sonho ruim!** [igual p. 188]
- 15 eu não queria **deixá-lo**, jack... mas eu tenho que ir pra **casa**, pelo **bobby**.
[igual p. 212]
- 16 você ainda não me **disse** o que **você disse**
- 17 essas mulheres estão como eu, esperando os **maridos?** [igual p. 202]

I had to do the same for pages 363-365 – the last pages of the book – where the speech balloons are fragments of dialogue from pages 235-237. Found some inconsistencies as well – some lines that are not the same in the two pages –, and I don't know if they are intentional or if BWS “comeu bola”, as we say in Portuguese.

That's one of the questions I (politely) posed to him, or his editor in an e-mail my wife called an are-you-*really*-gonna-send-an-e-mail-*this*-size message. Unfortunately, I had to. But I didn't think it was so big. I also asked about “up the pins”, about “going Indian”, took the opportunity to ask about editable/layered balloons, as well as about page 273-274:

Pages 273-274: This is not exactly a translation question that affects the Brazilian edition, but I'm very curious - and I'm writing about the translation process for a magazine, so I'd like to understand it: Can the English translation balloons be edited out if need be? Is there artwork beneath them? I'm wondering about an eventual German edition of MONSTERS and how they will deal with these pages (probably cutting out the English dialogue and adding "<>" marks to the German dialogue).

I actually had to ask the publisher, Todavia, if I could contact BWS through them. They told me to contact the agent – who I've already had other dealings with – and see if she could talk to BWS's editor or the author himself. I sent the e-mail on Thursday; hope I can get answers before I finish my last draft and deliver the book to Todavia – hopefully by the end of next week.

Sunday, June 27

I haven't been working on Sundays, but made an exception today so I could get a good head start on the third draft. And I did it: 140 pages, roughly one third of the book. That's one of the three chunks I planned. Two to go!

Tuesday, June 29

Three chunks for three days, as predicted. Well, three days and a bit of a fourth. The *Monsters* translation is finished, according to my usual three-stage process.

Though it's not. Those questions I sent the author are still lingering, and they impact

something like five pages of the 360+ page book.

I sent Todavia the translation anyway, and told them we can make any corrections if and when the author replies. They are aware of my contact with the book's agent and are cc'ed on all e-mails.

Tuesday, July 20 and further on

It's been three weeks since last entry and since I've delivered a pre-final translation of *Monsters* to publisher Todavia. The agent finally got back to me with the author's answers. I sent the questions on June 24. Waiting one month for answers is nothing out of the ordinary.

Barry Windsor-Smith's answers, as conveyed by his agent, are short, sparse, and all of them finish with capslocked "PLEASE LEAVE AS IS".

'Up the pins' is a helicopter pilot term that I think heard somewhere at some time. PLEASE LEAVE AS IS.

'... going Indian ...': Indian Giver is a well known Americanism that means someone who gives you something then wants it back. The entire sequence is about the government awarding Bailey a medal or citation of some sort, but then taking it back without explanation, causing the awkward situation for Jack about Mrs Bailey. I think the term fits Jerry's personality very well. PLEASE LEAVE AS IS.

As for supposed inconsistencies on page 262 and how they reproduce previous dialogue: *"Yes, I meant them to be slightly different from the original utterances. They are Jack's memories, after all, not immutable data. LEAVE AS IS."*

There are other four replies on the same tone. He didn't answer me about the "German edition problem". Which, I guess, I was being too nosy to ask about.

The following day I finally got a much-delayed digital copy of *Comic Book Creator*, a comics arts specialty magazine whose 25th edition comes with a 37-page feature on *Monsters*, including a new interview with BWS. The interview is actually five (heavily illustrated) pages long, as BWS probably was not in the mood for talking (as in the previously mentioned *Guardian* interview).

Most of the magazine's feature is dedicated to a retelling of BWS's 50-year career; how *Monsters* began as a proposal for a Hulk comic book that was not approved due to the use of expletives like "goddamn" and "bitch"; how this proposal, which included artwork, got into the hands of other Marvel comics creators, and its central idea was used in a Hulk comic without any credit to BWS; how mad BWS was when he found about it, many years after the Hulk comic was published, when a journalist commented on it during an interview; and some insider's perspective on the part of an assistant to BWS who can tell some things about the long, 30-year-plus road of putting *Monsters* in a drawer, then getting back to it, then putting it back in the drawer, then getting back it... and finally finishing and releasing it as an almost 400-page graphic novel. Most of this history does not come from BWS's own mouth, though.

It's always nice to understand the backstory of a project I am working on as a translator. Sometimes it affects the way I translate it, or it makes me go back and rework some words due to new meanings. The *Comic Book Creator* feature, though, as interesting as it is, did not lead me to think through or alter what I had already translated, as some criticism I mentioned in earlier entries did.

*

I applied some minor revisions to the translation and resubmitted it to once again to *Todavia*. It's done.

On my part, I mean. The translation text will pass by a *preparador* or *preparadora* (an expert copy-editor, who will collate the text and check for inconsistencies) and by one proof-reader before getting to a letterer, who will apply the translation on the comic book pages. Then there's another proof-reading phase. And all of this will be under the watchful eyes of André Conti, the editor who commissioned me to do this translation, and who I've been working with for over ten years. He can contact me at any time of this editing process, but usually does not.

Monstros, the translated edition, is set to be published by *Todavia* sometime in 2022, probably by the second half of the year.

Addendum: Monday, August 15, 2022

Over a year after the last entry, I'm back, and I have news.

– It's not usual for me to be involved with the editing process of a translation. *Monsters* was an exception. After being *preparado* by Silvia Massimini Felix – a *preparadora* is sort of an expert copy-editor, and each and every book goes through *preparação* in the Brazilian publishing market, as I explained in an earlier entry – the translation text was handed back to me and the publisher asked me to go through it one more time, approving or rejecting some changes. It was mostly a discussion on the use of the imperative form. In Portuguese, you may translate “take off your glasses!” as “tira os óculos!” or “tire os óculos” – the former is the singular second person imperative, it is somewhat grammatically *incorrect*, and I consider it *conversational*; the latter is the singular third person imperative, it is grammatically correct, and I consider it *formal*. I used the conversational, “incorrect”, second person imperative in most imperatives, but the *preparadora* argued that the formal imperative would be more accurate and true-to-life. I agreed with her for some characters and some scenes but rejected some of her changes. I do not hold final say, though. The text still went through proper proof-reading and the main editor, who made final decisions.

– I was also asked to write what some publishers call *aparatos*: copy for the flaps and for the back cover of *Monsters*. One of the flaps is a summary of the book, the other is Barry Windsor-Smith's short bio. For the back cover, I wrote a presentation paragraph and selected blurbs from starred reviews. There are many to pick from, so I went with choice quotes from *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The Guardian* and *The Paris Review*.

– Had the chance to talk to Lilian Mitsunaga, *Monstros*' letterer. Mitsunaga has worked in comics lettering non-stop since the late 1970s and she's seen and worked on every comic you can conceive of. Including other BWS comics – she even told me she's got BWS' digital handwritten font from an earlier assignment. For *Monsters*, though, licensing asked all international publishers to apply a regular comics font by **Comicraft**. The only atypical feature of the process, Mitsunaga told me – compared to other contemporary assignments, not to the whole of her career, of course – was the high number of balloons per page, some sound effects and that cross-stitched "Home SWEET home" on page 59, which had to be fully remade for the "Lar DOCE Lar" translation. "When you're working on black and white comics, lettering tends to be easier", she told me. It took her two days to erase text from all balloons, and one full week to refill all balloons in Portuguese – for all 368 pages. Mitsunaga is jet-powered.



Monstros, detail from page 59.

– Since my last entry, as far as I could gather, *Monsters* was published in Italy (trans. by Matteo Curtoni and Maura Parolini for **Mondadori**), France (trans. by Marc Duveau for **Delcourt**), Spain (trans. by Francisco Pérez Navarro for **Dolmen Editorial**), Portugal (trans. by Filipe Faria for **G. Floy Studio**), and Germany (trans. by Jano Rohleder and Rowam Rüster for **Cross Cult**). I had the chance to check the German edition and sate my curiosity on those pages with German-speaking "simultaneous translation" balloons. The translated edition solution was to split up each of these dialogues between two balloons, the original English-speaking one and the original German-speaking one. So the reader doesn't "hear" the interpreter soldier translating the Nazis anymore. I also heard some comments that the German edition made some corrections to BWS' somewhat poor German.

– *Monsters* garnered three 2022 Eisner Awards, the most prestigious American comic book award. The categories were best writer/artist, best letterer, and best graphic album (new). It's kind of a last tribute to BWS; his editor, who accepted the awards on behalf of the author in the July ceremony for the Eisners, stated *Monsters* is BWS's last work in his 50-year career.



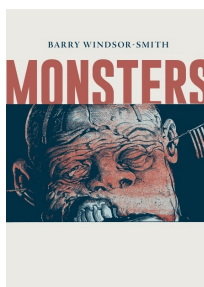
Online ad for *Monstros* by publisher Todavia.

– Todavia, *Monsters*' Brazilian publisher, set up a great online marketing campaign for the book's preorders. Posts like [this one](#) and [this one](#) on their Instagram account delve into the origins of the book and its author. Todavia also sponsored famous YouTube and Instagram comics channels to create videos [on *Monsters*](#) and on BWS' career. The graphic novel is deemed expensive for Brazilian standards: its cover price is R\$ 149,90, roughly 28 € or US\$ 29. As the *real* is currently devalued, though, it's the cheapest *Monsters* edition in the world. The American one and the German one cost US\$ 40 and 40 €, respectively. Some Brazilian readers are [complaining](#) about the exclusive Brazilian cover, with a different illustration, and Todavia's option for a softcover edition. According to the publisher, half the print run is already sold to bookstores.

Monstros, *Monsters*'s Brazilian edition, comes out officially on September 8, 2022, roughly 500 days after I started this journal.

Endnoten

- 1 Barry Windsor-Smith: *Monsters*, Jonathan Cape, 2021.



#Comic



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Érico Assis is a Brazilian translator and journalist. He translates French and English comics, fiction, and non-fiction for the main publishing houses in Brazil, such as Companhia das Letras, Panini, Todavia, and Darkside. He's also a free-lance comics critic for newspapers (Folha de S. Paulo, O Globo) and websites (Omelete), and co-creator of Notas dos Tradutores, a podcast about translation. He was the guest editor of some surveys of Brazilian comics, such as *O Fabuloso Quadrinho Brasileiro de 2015* (Narval, 2015) and *Brazil Comics Catalog* (a collaboration with Brazil's Ministry of Foreign Affairs published in Portuguese, French, English and Spanish). He holds a PhD in Translation Studies, and is the author of *Balões de Pensamento* (Balão Editorial, 2020), a book of essays on comics.

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