

VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO TRANSLATION AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sidney, Sir Philip; *Astrophil and Stella*, Bilingual Edition by Fernando Galván.
Madrid: Cátedra, 1991.

Bennett, Bruce with Peter Cowan, John Hay, Susan Ashford; *Western
Australian Writing: A Bibliography*. The University of Western Australia,
Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press in association with The Centre for
Studies in Australian Literature, 1990.

Translation is never an easy task no matter the genre or text, but somehow poetry has always seemed one of the most daunting challenges that can confront a translator. Poetry demands not only the precise exercising of the translator's linguistic skills in both the original and target language, but also the subtle incorporation of the rhythms and musicality of the original verse, where possible, without distorting either the natural flow of the target language or the meaning of the text, this together with the selection of the "mot juste" as the correct vehicle to translate the many facets of significance conveyed by the use of complex metaphors, condensed language and other poetic devices embedded in the original text.

The resistance often encountered by publishers seeking translations of early classical texts stems, in part, from the belief held by many that modern poetry might be an easier task, a belief based on the false premise that the translator's proximity to the linguistic and social milieu from which the modern text emerges initially facilitates his work. Any such belief is soon dispelled when dealing with the writings of many contemporary poets where the syntactical, lexical and phonetic complexities of language combine with abstruse allusion, and the elaboration of specifically personal imagery to produce texts of multi-layered significance handled with formidable skill and subtlety as is the case with writers like Eliot, Yeats, Porter, Hughes and Heaney, to name only a few.

There is no such thing as an easy literary text. One presumes, often erroneously, that the translator will be an expert in both the linguistic and cultural background of the writer he is dealing with and thus the temporal proximity of text and translator is of no specific relevance or advantage. Surely the complexities of the linguistic gymnastics in which the translator will find himself involved will not differ that much if he is handling John Donne or Craig Raine? Indeed, to have exercised his expertise on one might well enable him to approach the other with greater ease and freedom.

Another much voiced opinion is that poetry should only be translated by poets. One fails to see why the same is not to be said of fiction especially with regard to experimental and poetic prose. Certainly many fine translations have come from the pens of poets but to assume that they alone are the only fit translators of their art is both to deny the potential for artistic creativity and interpretation that has revealed itself in the work of many, often anonymous, translators of verse, and to ignore the basic fact that while there are many poets, not that many are skilled bilingualists.

To say that a text should always be read in the original, another excuse raised when questioning the dearth of poetry in translation, is to state the obvious and again to be totally unrealistic given that for the majority of readerships across the world the only possible access to other literatures is through the translated text. Almost certainly in most translations there will be cases of linguistic imprecisions but the reader would hope that the translated version will be free of grave linguistic errors or misinterpretations though, almost inevitably, there will be occasions of slight deviation from the original. Almost inevitably too, the bilingual reader and academic will take some delight in picking holes in the final version if only as a result of the multiplicity of interpretations that a text may offer and because his own criteria of lexical selection will differ in many cases as a matter of both subjective interpretation and linguistic taste. All the translator can do is to render the original text into the target language as honestly as he is able, listening closely to the writer's voice and always remaining sensitive and alert to the wealth of possibilities afforded him by his medium: language.

Fernando Galván's translation of Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, is a mammoth task and one that has been undertaken with great skill, sensitivity and honesty. He has taken great care throughout the text not to force the Spanish version by imposing rhyme and metrical patterns except where the language permitted their inclusion, but never on a systematic basis, thereby creating patterns of echoes which enhance the musicality of the translated text without forcing the whole to conform to Sidney's original tightly corseted rhyme patterns. The result is a text which, as he himself says, aims to "remain as faithful as possible to the original English."¹ Here Galván has kept in mind that the aim of the bi-lingual text is twofold: to support the reader with a certain knowledge of English in his/her approach to the original text and to give the wider non-bilingual readership access to Sidney's work. His handling of Sidney's delightfully elegant language, amazing range of tone, subtle imagery and experimentation with the sonnet form itself is balanced, precise, with careful attention to tone thus bringing the flavour of the original as close as possible to his second audience: the Spanish reading public at large. Although, as in all translations however, there are points which may be considered by some to be at variance with the original such as the occasions where, perhaps, the syntactic inversions employed by the translator in an attempt to reflect Sidney's almost perverse predilection for such style, hinders the natural flow of the language and, on very rare occasions, obscures the meaning, Galván has exerted meticulous control over his text. The verse produced is smoothly elegant, reproducing many of the qualities an English reader would associate with the mind and style of Sidney. Certainly the thorough, perceptive introduction by Galván to the translation paves the way for the Spanish reader by presenting him with a well documented and perceptive analysis of the man, his times and work. With regard to the introduction one might perhaps have wished for a greater discussion of Sidney's use of *antonomasia* and the relevance of it to sixteenth and seventeenth century poets in England, especially, perhaps, if we bear in mind that Galván's translation is, in part, aimed at supporting approaches to Sidney's work by students of English literature.

1.- My translation of Fernando Galván's text.

Quite frequently the reader of a text in translation finds his/her attention being incessantly, and often unnecessarily, diverted by explanatory footnotes. In fact at times one suspects that the translator may be indulging in a footnote in avoidance of a linguistic or rhetorical complexity within the text itself. The footnotes in Galván's text are kept to a minimum allowing the reader full concentration on the text. Clarification in footnotes is given only where absolutely necessary and bearing in mind the difficulties that such a text may present to the average Spanish speaking reader unfamiliar with Sidney's work. This together with Galván's fine introduction to Sidney and the short but extremely relevant bibliography make the text a valuable contribution to the field of English Studies in Spain. Most importantly however, the translator deserves warmest congratulations for producing such a balanced and sensitive rendering of a work as complex as Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*.

The compiling of bibliographies shares something in common with translation; it is work which remains not anonymous like so many translations, but certainly removed from the limelight of most academic publications. There seems to be a general assumption that a bibliographer's work is arid and counter-creative. Experience has proved to me at least that this is not the case, in spite of the evidently mechanical nature of the final compilation of the data collected. Nevertheless, bibliography still remains low on the list of most academic publishing and few researchers devote time to it, in the main preferring other areas of academic activity. As with translation, compiling a bibliography is, or should be, the work of a specialist proficient in the field or author to be covered and who has a "bibliographer's nose" for picking up the slightest clue that might lead to valuable sources. *Western Australian Writing: A Bibliography*, by Bruce Bennett with Peter Cowan, John Hay and Susan Ashford covers both creative writing by Western Australian authors and non-fictional works on specifically Western Australian concerns from the times of the first contacts with the territory up to 1988.

The bibliography is divided into two sections. The first, "Western Australian Literature", provides entries on literary texts by Western Australian authors and texts with Western Australia as subject matter. Included in this section are those who "have made a 'literary' contribution and (are considered) to be Western Australian by dint of a significant period of residence, or by identification with Western Australia in some way or other", although the criterion used to determine the period of residence is not given.² This first section contains over 700 authors from the famous to others who may only now have begun to come to light as a result of their inclusion in the bibliography. The work therefore affords a valuable primary source for researchers in the field of Western Australian studies ranging as it does from autobiography to works by Aborigines and migrant writers among others.

The bibliography has been structured in such a way as to offer maximum clarity and ease of access to the user. Each entry lists the genre concerned and the whole of a writer's work is displayed in the same entry together with the pertinent critical and biographical writings on the author concerned. Thus the user is not forced to move

tiesomely backwards and forwards through the material to find all the references to one author, as is so often the case with more traditional layouts.

As Bennett points out in his introduction, Part One aims to be comprehensive while the second part, titled "Cultural, Environmental and Historical Accounts", offers a selective but nonetheless wide range of non-fictional works which affords the researcher invaluable documentation on most aspects of the Western Australian background.

One of the important inclusions in this very extensive Bibliography is the entry of unpublished works, particularly drama which may have been performed but not published thus providing a most important source for future researchers in the field of Western Australian Studies in particular and Australian Studies in general.

Western Australian Writing: A Bibliography, fills one of the many gaps in the field of bibliographies on aspects of Australian Studies and will be welcomed by researchers both in Australia and abroad for its breadth, careful documentation and ease of access. A most welcome and necessary addition to both public and personal libraries.

S. B.