

2013

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Recommended Citation

Racz, Gregary, "No Anxiety of Influence: Ethics in Poetry Retranslation after Analogical Form" (2013). *Faculty of Foreign Languages Publications*. 1.
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No Anxiety of Influence: Ethics in Poetry Retranslation after Analogical Form

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Retranslation as a Topic in Translation Studies

Retranslation, the second or subsequent rendering of a ST into the same TL, is hardly uncharted territory in the Translation Studies canon, but its scattershot treatment reveals little critical consensus among theorists and practitioners. Consider, for starters, the fundamental question of feasibility and need. “I believe firmly in new translations for every generation,” James S Holmes states in what may well be, under ideal circumstances, the majority opinion (Holmes, 1989: 72), while J. M Cohen’s time frame for successive renderings is more leisurely. “Every great book demands to be re-translated once in a century,” he writes, citing a reason that finds a host of proponents in the prevailing climate of TT assimilation, viz., “to suit the change in standards and taste of new generations, which will differ radically from those of the past” (Cohen, 1962: 9). On the opposing side, Ben Bennani insightfully notes that “unless a translation achieves status as canon, it must undergo periodic rebirth” (Bennani, 1981: 136), a

position Allen Tate echoes in his 1970 International Poetry Festival lecture with the following contrast: “unlike literary criticism, which translations somewhat resemble, good translations are never obsolete” (Tate, 1972: 5). Inexplicably, though, in a round-table discussion published in the same slim pamphlet in which this lecture appears, Tate goes on to say regarding various renderings of Homer’s *Odyssey*: “it seems to me translations have to be redone all the time” (Tate, 1972: 16)!

Nor is the rationale for retranslation always cogently set forth, although in almost all cases the argument regarding the viability of a subsequent rendering is linked to the primacy of contemporary TT poetics. T. S. Eliot, for example, in his querulous “Euripides and Professor Murray,” laments in this vein that “Greek poetry will never have the slightest vitalizing effect upon English poetry if it can only appear masquerading as a vulgar debasement of the eminently personal idiom of Swinburne” (Eliot, 1964: 73). Without invoking the complicated question of intervening models, John Felstiner writes more broadly: “In most cases, the idiom of translators goes staler sooner than that of other writers, so that ideally, the salient poets from any period deserve retranslating for the ear of each new generation” (Felstiner, 1980: 17). This assertion, too, may reflect a widespread agreement on the matter, but is short on explaining just how this “staleness” comes about. Jean Boase-Beier does better to pinpoint one likely cause, but cannot generalize her insight to all retranslations. “Some translations do date,” she affirms, careful not to offer a blanket observation. “But they are much more likely to be those that try to mimic for the target language audience the supposed effects on the source language audience. Those that concentrate on making the original as visible as possible are not more likely to date than the original itself” (Boase-Beier, 1999: 12). On this same topic, in contrast, Barbara Folkart largely eschews the foreignization/domestication debate with a gloomy pronouncement about the ambit

of literary translation as a whole: “The reason most of the literary ‘classics’ have to be re-translated, generation after generation, while the originals endure,” she avers, “is that (untrendy as it may be to say so) *many translations are inferior to the originals, as texts*. For one thing, translations are not always held to the highest standards of artistic creation for their day...” (Folkart, 2007: 135).

Translation Studies likewise stands divided on the question of which translation of a literary text among two or more might serve its ST better/best. Walter Benjamin famously opined that “important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin,” an interpolation in putative support of a literary ST’s eternal *Nachleben* (Benjamin, 1992: 73). Jacques Derrida’s turn on this subject follows Benjamin’s: “every first translation...is imperfect and, so to speak, impure. It is imperfect because translation defectiveness and the impact of ‘norms’ appear often heavily, and it is impure because it is both an introduction and a translation” (in Berman, 2009: 67). Meredith Oakes, on the other hand, in specific reference to the potential pitfalls of archaizing drama translation, counters these assertions with the belief that “the only translation that really might last is the one that is written close to the time when the play is written” (Oakes, 1996: 287), a position Holmes, too, espouses, but with a twist:

I think there is one exception to this need for new translations. Sometimes translations which are almost contemporary to the original can last. For instance, I don’t think any of us would want to read a nineteenth-century translation of Rabelais, but I think the seventeenth-century translation in English is readable in the same way as the original. Translations either have to be contemporary with the original or contemporary with us, and nothing in between satisfies, although this is not always the case. There is a Dutch translation of Whitman contemporary with Whitman, and the

Dutch is absolutely unreadable. The Dutch language has changed so much over the past hundred years that in this case the translation is absolutely unuseable. (Holmes, 1993: 120)

Then again, Felstiner hazards this opinion based on his reading of Ángel Flores's earlier versions of Pablo Neruda: "possibly the early stage of translating a poet is inevitably marked by too much fealty: word-for-word or sense-for-sense renderings that stop short of exploiting the translator's own tongue" (Felstiner, 1980: 16-17). On this point, Isabelle Vanderschelden at first appears to disagree but, approaching the question from the angle of TC assimilation, oddly comes to concur, writing: "first translations often have the function of introduction, and therefore tend to favour, in Lawrence Venuti's terms, a 'naturalizing' approach, which aims at reducing the distance between the original and the translation, thus making its reception in the TL easier... it is significant that re-translations tend to favour a more literal rendering of the original than first translations; this can be perceived as a 'movement toward the source text'. Once a text has been introduced in a given TL culture, it seems to become more possible to re-translate it in a more 'foreignizing' way (Venuti's term)" (Vanderschelden, 2000: 1155).

The Ethical Question in Retranslation

What critical writings about retranslation consistently do proffer is a circumambience of ethical observation. Ethics has been in the fore again of late in Translation Studies, proposing ideals for operational standards that far surpass such practical (and simplistic) rules of thumb as that of faithfully following contemporary methodology to the best of one's ability and the like. Concerns seem to cluster alternately around questions of hegemony and literality. Since at least the 1990s, as such foundational anthologies as *The Translation Studies Reader* attest, Lawrence

Venuti, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and others have in various ways advocated counteracting English-language dominance through strategies of resistance that flout textual fluency, the translator's invisibility, and the cultural homogenization of all ST discourses into a contemporary American idiom. Antoine Berman similarly declares that "the ethical act consists in recognizing and receiving the Other as Other" (in Pym, 2010: 104), while elsewhere broaching issues of method in stating: "The translator has every right as soon as he is open" (Berman, 2009: 75). Willis Barnstone concurs with Berman's view regarding the moral status of unconventional (read "non-literal") renderings, writing that "[t]here is no deception, no false expectation, as long as the method of transformation is named and acknowledged" (Barnstone, 1993: 85), and Kathleen Davis neatly subsumes both these approaches in the following statement: "A translation is a responsible response only if it answers *both* to the general laws guiding and safeguarding interpretation of the text and to that which is singularly other within it" (Davis, 2001: 93). Literary translators may find Peter Newmark's recent pronouncements on translational ethics more at odds with current methodologies. Basing his views on the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Newmark counsels that "where prejudiced language is used in the source text, in respect of gender, race, colour, religion, class, age, mental health or physical appearance, it has generally to be pointed out in a translator's preface or the footnotes, unless the text is historical" (Newmark, 2009: 21). Ethical considerations here appear to trump conventional practice.

Of course, an additional ethical concern not mentioned above but of vital interest with respect to retranslation is the prurient question of "borrowing" and influence, particularly undue influence and, not put too fine a point on it, what some in the field might deem outright "cheating." At least since the Romantic period, independent artistic production has been prized

above the sort of “collaborative” efforts and enslavement to *imitatio* that variously characterized pre-modern eras prone to backward glancing at classical antiquity. What sort of relation might reasonably be expected to exist between a second or subsequent translation of a literary ST and all other (re)translations of the same work? In his amusingly titled “Déjà Lu: Recurrence, Allusion, and Plagiarism in Translation,” Eugene Eoyang delineates three, only the first two of which he considers acceptable: (1) recurrence, where one translation builds on, or incorporates other versions; (2) allusion, where one translation complements another translation (or other translations); and (3) plagiarism, where one translation pretends to be a different and original translation” (Eoyang, 1999: 269). Citing the King James Bible as an example of the first, Arthur Waley’s and Ezra Pound’s versions of the *Shijing* as examples of the second, and Stephen Mitchell’s “compositely borrowed renderings” of the *Tao Te Ching* as an example of the third, Eoyang argues for a qualitative distinction between what he calls “(1) intertextuality, which is creative license; (2) influence, which is creative opposition; and (3) imposture, which is uncreative theft” (Eoyang, 1999: 269-270). Yet, is the compelling concern here one of deception and fraud or of intellectual honesty and artistic authenticity?

The question seems hardly to have arisen before the nineteenth century. The routine consultation of prior translations from the late Middle Ages through the Renaissance and into the Age of Enlightenment often found its rationale in the poor quality of available lexica. As Louis Kelly matter-of-factly points out: “To supplement the dictionary and to suggest interpretations, many translators worked, especially in literature, with other translations at their elbow” (Kelly, 1979: 129). Berman reminds readers of the three-pronged nature of such a technique; under ideal circumstances, translators might lean on previous translations in their own language, existing translations into other languages, and even translations contemporaneous with the

retranslation they are undertaking (Berman, 2009: 67). In the prologue to his vernacular translation of the *Song of Songs* (c. 1561), for example, Fray Luis de León flatly admits comparing Greek and Latin versions of the Hebrew ST (Ruiz Casanova, 2000: 225). The case of John Dryden is even more emblematic. Translation comprises fully two-thirds of the poetic output of this giant of Augustan letters, and certainly no one would accuse him of needing to augment his own considerable talents by pilfering from others. Still (and Venuti's phrasing is telling here), Dryden "admired Denham's version of Book II so much that he absorbed no fewer than eighty lines of it in his own version of the *Aeneid*" (Venuti, 1995: 64). William Frost similarly makes the following apology for such recurrence on Dryden's behalf: "Actually, as he was well aware, he began his work at the end of a century of experimentation with the Englishing of foreign poets; and it would have been as foolish for him not to investigate his predecessors as it was impossible for him to remain wholly uninfluenced by what he found to be their occasional successes" (Frost, 1969: 3). From reading the Earl of Roscommon's *An Essay on Translated Verse*, Charles Tomlinson likewise devises "the seventeenth-century way of translating, using every hint you can from previous translators and commentators," adding with respect to the *Georgics* that "Dryden, when he came to translate Virgil, used up to nine previous editions and their commentaries" (Tomlinson, 2003: 79).

Surely more interesting are the instances in which retranslators, purposefully inscribing themselves within a line of (inevitably historicized) versions, render a given ST with one, some or all of the intervening translations in mind. Alfonso Reyes notes the unavoidable influence of this push-and-pull in his study of Spanish translations of Stéphane Mallarmé: "The mere encounter of two translators on equal ground produces curious results: (1) First of all, the original translator exerts an attraction on the second one; (2) the second translator, in order to

flee from this attraction, is obliged at times to abandon strict sense, and (3) with respect to the same line of poetry, combinations of these cases are likely to occur” (in Ruiz Casanova, 2000: 469, my translation). George Steiner phrases the same phenomenon more succinctly—indeed, parenthetically—summing up the unique position of retranslators as follows: “the translator translates after and against his predecessors almost as much as he translates his source” (Steiner, 1975: 391). Undoubtedly, this is what Jorge Luis Borges had in mind when he remarks in reference to Captain Richard Francis Burton as retranslator of *The Thousand and One Nights*: “Lane translated against Galland, Burton against Lane; to understand Burton we must understand this hostile dynasty” (Borges, 1999: 92). In the same vein, Eoyang points out the anomaly of the near-zero overlap between Pound’s retranslation of the Chinese classic of songs and Waley’s earlier efforts: “In their translations of the 305 poems in the *Shijing*, there is a remarkable consistency in the dissimilarities between Pound’s version and Waley’s. Mere chance, even the vagaries of errant translation and idiosyncratic interpretations, might have produced at least a few translations where the original meaning was so determinative that two translators might come up with similar versions. Yet one is hard-pressed to find a single *Shijing* poem in which Pound’s version could be confused with Waley’s. It was as if Pound wrote anti-Waley versions of the Chinese classic” (Eoyang, 1999: 277). It is, in fact, difficult if not impossible to determine what percentage of modern literary translators consults prior translated versions of their ST or what sort of motivations they might possess along the continuum from imitation-as-sincerest-form-of-flattery to laziness to theft. Still, it is hardly unheard of to come across a staunch practitioner like Jacek Laskowski who, when faced with an impasse in rendering Molière, eyes an existing paperback translation of this author but proclaims: “Do I rush through the pages and find out how previous translators have unraveled this impossible knot? Of course I

don't! I'm doing my own translation and it would be unprofessional of me to reach for colleagues' work" (Laskowski, 1996: 189).

Given the uncertainty in literary retranslation of determining what sort of debt may be owed to whom, it is strangely refreshing to come across a comment like this one from Donald Frame: "I strongly favor regarding translation, like scholarship, as a cumulative undertaking, and therefore borrowing—or stealing—whenever you see that your own best solution to a problem is clearly inferior to someone else's" (Frame, 1989: 82), or this likeminded one from William Gass, in which he gleefully describes himself as "a jackal who comes along after the kill to nose over the uneaten hunks [and] keeps everything he likes" from earlier translations of Rilke (Gass, 1999: 76). When, to its advantage and profit, a TT either partially echoes or repeats verbatim the words, style, form or phrasing of a previous translation, not only do the pros and cons of a comparative approach to retranslation become clear, but aesthetic intent colors the moral dynamic. Consider the following rumination by Theodore Savory on "a question of some delicacy":

If he [the retranslator] has conceived a phrase which, he believes, exactly expresses the author's meaning, and if he then finds that one or more of his predecessors have used it already, what should he do? Authority has spoken, not for the first time, with divided opinions. There have been those who have said that a translation, when once made, must not be improved by comparisons with its forerunners; and those who have gone further and asserted that such a comparison must be made for the purpose of removing any 'fortuitous coincidences'. This, if strictly applied, is nonsense. Virgil wrote, at the beginning of the Second Aeneid, '*Conticuere omnes*', which one has translated 'All were hushed' and another as 'All were silent'. What can a new translator suggest? 'They all held their tongues'.

A more acceptable point of view, put forward by Professor Postgate, gives a diametrically opposite opinion. If a translator

who has done his best finds that some of his phrases have been used by others before him, he should in no way feel obliged to alter them. On the contrary, he has 'one more reason for their retention'. (Savory, 1968: 54)

As the retranslator's motivation was not to rely fundamentally or unduly on another's product but to formulate the finest TT s/he could given all existing sources—scholarship and prior translations among these—Savory's conclusion seems safe from moral reproach. It is motive (to the extent this is knowable) and not outcome that potentially exposes the retranslator to censure. Indeed, Savory posits as common-sense practice what Frame rewords as admonition: "Unless you believe you can markedly improve on all existing translations, and do that without anthologizing (combining everyone else's best parts), I don't think you should translate for publication" (Frame, 1989: 83). This is unequivocally Eoyang's problem with Mitchell. It appears that the greatest sin one can commit in the retranslation of poetry (or of poeticized prose) is not to attempt, sincerely and wholeheartedly, to build upon the primacy and efficacy of earlier efforts. As Eoyang writes: "From a literary point of view, the fault in Mitchell's translation of the *Dao De Jing* is not that he borrowed someone else's literary property, but rather that he failed to make it his own... the fault lies in failing to take creative control of what one has appropriated" (Eoyang, 1999: 283, 289-90).

This same judgment finds a rather close parallel in "Ethical questions in literary translation," a ludic appendix to Clifford E. Landers's *Literary Translation* that offers practical advice to working translators in line with the moral considerations underlying the discipline. Question 8, which could not be more direct, asks in full: "Would you read an earlier translation of a novel or short story before beginning your own translation? Yes No of a poem? Yes

□ No □” (Landers, 2001: 211). The generic distinction between works in prose and poetry here is attention-grabbing, though not explicitly justified in Landers’s answer:

No (whether short story, novel, or poem). In all three genres the same danger lurks: your perception of meaning—that is, how you interpret ambiguous terms—as well as your choice of vocabulary and even syntax may be influenced unconsciously by exposure to previous translations. While this is not plagiarism, why subject yourself to second-guessing? Note that there is no ethical constraint against checking your own translation against previous ones upon completion of your first draft. The fact that the ideal word or turn of phrase has already appeared in an earlier translation should not preclude your own use of it; isolated words can’t be copyrighted, and there are only so many ways to express, say, ‘She turned heads wherever she went.’ (Landers, 2001: 213)

The response is notable for the conflation of all genres in literary retranslation; the willingness to admit of a gray area between intertextuality, influence, and imposture; the demurral of hand-wringing over the hope or need for absolute originality, and the pragmatism regarding the double-checking of work in progress against earlier TT versions. Indeed, Landers seems to introduce amid the admirable practicality of his professionalism a low-key ethical consideration at the stage of self-editing. In accord with some of the views expressed above, a retranslator ought to do everything in his/her power to ensure the production of an original and error-free TT. Consulting a prior translation or translations once a TT draft has been finished thus becomes but one judicious step in the entire enterprise of retranslation, one available uniquely to the retranslator. Noel Clark, too, sees the desirability in such consultation and, with respect to highly canonical STs, provides sound advice on how a retranslator, in this case of dramatic works, might proceed. He writes:

There seems to me no harm...in a translator looking at previous translations, if they exist—*after* completing his own version. He may, indeed, have a duty to do so. Only the most arrogant translator would rule out the possibility of having misread or misunderstood a word, line or passage of the original. Often his own sixth sense will alert the translator to a possible misapprehension. In which case, study of an earlier version can help clear up a doubt or suggest a fresh approach. When ‘stumped’ by some archaic word or phrase in a foreign classic, I always try, if possible, to seek enlightenment from a ‘school’ edition of the play with text-notes in the original language. (Clark, 1996: 26)

Here again, the prevailing ethical concern surrounding retranslation is not with discovering the deception in the pirating of previous work but with the retranslator’s moral imperative to strive for a new aesthetic rendering.

The Ethics of Poetry Retranslation in the Age of Organic Form

Has the entire question of untoward influence or “copying” been rendered moot in poetry retranslation by the lengthy predominance of organic-form translation in Anglo-American practice? Holmes posits the strategy as one of four possible verse ways to render (essentially) metrical poetry, excluding such options as prose, phonemic, and interlineal versions, which preclude the TT from standing alone as a poetic object in its own right. He classifies “mimetic form” and “analogical form” as “form-derivative” methods, while categorizing “organic form” and “extraneous” or “deviant form” as “content-derivative.” Of the four, mimetic is quite uncommon and entails the use of the exact ST form in the TT (as if that were a possibility) while extraneous, better known as “imitation,” cannot be considered translation proper, since the “translator” uses the ST poem as a kind of springboard for his/her own creative designs.

Analogical form, then, the prevailing method of poetry translation in the West from the Renaissance until the first decades of the twentieth century (with notable pockets of exception), “sought a form that filled a parallel function within the poetic tradition of the target language,” which has mostly meant rendering rhymed, metrical STs with some sort of meter and rhyme scheme aesthetically acceptable to TL ears (Holmes, 1970: 95). Conversely, using the strategy of organic form, the dominant methodology since the advent of free verse and, more surely, the end of the Second World War, the translator “starts from the semantic material, allowing it to take on its own unique poetic shape as the translation develops” (Holmes, 1970: 96). Writing of the latter as manifested in what now basically amounts to nearly a century of unmetred, unrhymed renderings of rhyming, metered STs, Robert Wechsler sums up the situation nicely with a kind of lament for lost poeticality: “The most popular choice in America today—of free verse in the translation of formal poetry—throws out poetic form to such an extent that the images and other aspects of content can all be relatively easily preserved. And the results are rarely terrible, but usually mediocre, because the approach is a given and too easy to be inspiring” (Wechsler, 1998: 74).

This opinion is borne out by three bilingual volumes of Spanish Renaissance poetry recently published by the University of Chicago Press: *Selected Poems of Luis de Góngora* and *Selected Poems of Garcilaso de la Vega*, both translated by John Dent-Young, and *Selected Poetry of Francisco de Quevedo*, translated by Christopher Johnson. Many, though by no means all, of the time-honored poems included in these collections exist in prior English-language versions, often in more than one rendering. (A consultation of Robert S. Rudder’s *The Literature of Spain in English Translation: A Bibliography* and the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*—which has no entry on Garcilaso—as well as an exhaustive search of

print and online bibliographical resources were undertaken for the present study to ensure that all reasonably available prior translations of the poetical works retranslated in these books were read. This process, as will be argued below, was not occasioned by any suspicions surrounding the motivations of the translators, whose professional integrity remains above reproach.) Taken as a whole, the TTs in these three volumes can resemble glorified line-readings, typical of the organic method: prosy, flat, even occasionally awkward. All too frequently, the Introductions to the renderings and/or the Commentary/Notes supply weak justifications for the de-poeticization of the approach. Dent-Young, for example, writes of two of his versions of Góngora: “Here I have not made a serious attempt to reproduce the form beyond trying to keep the lines as short as possible, but I have tried to keep the conversational tone,” and “I have tried to capture the spirit, without reproducing the rhyme scheme” (Dent-Young, 2009: 234, 235). On a slightly different tack, Johnson offers a justification of his decision to abandon strict rhyme and meter based on the propagation of an alternative poetics, explaining: “I pursue less obvious forms of euphony such as internal and feminine rhyme, broken rhyme, near rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and consonance to capture some of the original’s music” (Johnson, 2009: 24-25). Be that as it may, it appears highly unlikely that today’s retranslators using organic form would even bother to look at earlier renderings; barring some pressing need for semantic or hermeneutic clarification, modern-day poetry retranslators produce TT versions so utterly different from their (often) pre-twentieth-century counterparts that conventional forms of influence appear not only out of the question, but largely unsought and undesired.

A single example of contemporary organic-form translation will suffice to provide a sense of the method. Below is Quevedo’s satirical “A un hombre de gran nariz” followed by Johnson’s translation “To a man with a big nose”:

Érase un hombre a una nariz pegado,
érase una nariz superlativa,
érase una alquitara medio viva,
érase un peje espada mal barbado;

era un reloj de sol mal encarado,
érase un elefante boca arriba,
érase una nariz sayón y escriba,
un Ovidio Nasón mal narigado.

Érase el espolón de una galera,
érase una pirámide de Egipto,
los doce tribus de narices era;

érase un naricísimo infinito,
frisón archinariz, caratulera,
sabañón garrafal, morado y frito.

There was a man stuck to a nose,
a superlative nose,
a bubbling beaker,
a badly bearded swordfish;

a crooked sundial,
an elephant's trunk,
a judge and jury nose,
a snuffling Ovidius Nosus.

a galley's battering ram,
an Egyptian pyramid,
a twelve-tribe nose;

an infinite schnoz, a hypernose,
a clown's mask, a supesized
coldsore, fried eggplant nose.

(Johnson, 2009: 142, 143)

In Johnson's English-language version, Quevedo's hendecasyllables and ABBAABBACDCDCD rhyme scheme are jettisoned in favor of a barer semantic transcription recalling Berman's commentary on Yves Bonnefoy's translations of Shakespeare (emblematic of most modern poetry translation) as displaying three characteristics: "a slight *condensation* of the original..., a noticeable *rejuvenation* of the original, and the production of a *slightly 'prosaic' poeticality*" (Berman, 2009: 19). The TT verse is condensed here, to name the most obvious instance, by the consistent omission of the verb "erase/era"; rejuvenated, to give one example, by the inclusion of the slangy "schnoz," and rendered more prose-like throughout. There is little chance that Johnson—who describes his approach by explaining "mainly I try to render the poems as faithfully as possible, though now and again at the expense of a regular meter's pace. Brevity rather than bombast...has been my aim" (Johnson, 2009: 24)—would have found

anything of profit in, for example, Jean Willard Burnham's "To a Nose," published in the important early anthology *Translations from Hispanic Poets* (1938) using a slightly different version of the ST:

There was a man well fastened to a nose—
A nose superlative did he escort;
An executioner or scribe, in short,
A sword well barbed and sharp against its foes.
It was a sundial badly out of pose,
It was a musing alchemist's retort,
An elephant with trunk upraised in sport,
More nose than Roman Ovid did expose.
It was a fighting galley's pointed beak,
It was a pyramid on Egypt's pate,
Twelve tribes of noses in one nose sublime,
An infinite nose of noses, so to speak,
Very much of a nose it was, a nose so great
That in the face of Annas 'twere a crime.

(Burnham, 1938: 73)

While most poetry translators in a century Holmes dubbed "the basically organic twentieth" (plus a decade and a bit now) might object to the syntax of the verb form "did he escort," the simplicity of the mostly monosyllabic rhymes, the archaism of "'twere," the occasional "filler" word or phrase, and other such minimal infelicities, few would contest the ultimate poetic advantages of Burnham's analogical-form version in iambic pentameter and rhyme (Holmes, 1970: 99). While poetry translations in analogical form are truly rare birds these days, an interested reader need not go back before World War II to find "A un hombre de gran nariz" similarly rendered: Willis Barnstone's marvelous "To a Nose," without any of the peccadilloes noted above, dates from his relatively recent anthology *Six Masters of the Spanish Sonnet*

(Barnstone, 1993: 51). There, too, one would be hard pressed to encounter collective poetic features that practitioners of organic form might admire, much less copy.

Of course, not all retranslators have a sense of themselves as competitors against earlier translators. Nor are all retranslations of poetic STs undertaken with primarily formal considerations in mind. Clark, for example, anticipating Landers, offers an alternative perspective on retranslation and influence when he writes: “Rarely—especially in dealing with verse—need a translator fear being tempted to adopt a predecessor’s rendering in any detail. There are too many different ways of conveying the sense of a word or phrase. However, since translation implies a personal response to the author’s text, to read someone else’s version first would be to risk preconditioning or, at least, colouring one’s own response to the original” (Clark, 1996: 26). This may well be wishful thinking (with a pronounced individualist bent) on Clark’s part, as both period conventions and a desire to inscribe oneself into a historical line of translators have, in the past, frequently ruled the day. Steering clear of formal questions in explaining why he chose to undertake the retranslation of two German-language Romantic poets, Christopher Middleton says: “I particularly wanted to do Mörike because the particular translations that I’d glanced at seemed to me bookish, and they hadn’t gotten anywhere near the freshness and the nerviness of his very subtle idiom. And I wanted to translate Hölderlin because I felt that Michael Hamburger’s pioneering and exemplary translations hadn’t touched a certain quality of Hölderlin’s language” (Middleton, 1985: 189). This, again, clearly differs from the more typical paradigm of past centuries, when similarities in analogical approach more easily enabled *imitatio*, borrowing or theft. To return to an example cited above, Dryden, as J. M. J. Bottkol points out, “had open before him on the table one or more earlier English translations, particularly those which were written in heroic couplets. From these he often took

rhymes, stray phrases, even whole lines and passages” (Bottkol, 1943: 243). Not surprisingly, Dent-Young, in contrast, does not (deign to?) consult J. H. Wiffen’s translation “On a Departure,” published in what must have seemed to him the antediluvian year 1823, before retranslating Garcilaso’s “Copla IV,” even though he somewhat bafflingly confesses: “I have no idea, especially in the case of Copla IV, whether my attempted translation comes anywhere near the meaning, which I find quite obscure: I hope though it is sufficient to give an idea of what is going on” (Dent-Young, 2007: 207)!

In only three instances do Dent-Young and Johnson make reference in their notes to prior translations of the STs they retranslate, a general failure (or demurrer) that almost certainly reflects a proleptic assumption about the utility of this act given the vast differences in approach between the analogical and organic methods. In keeping with the “content-derivative” nature of the organic approach, Dent-Young and Johnson repeatedly recur to academic criticism, and not to these earlier TT versions, to aid them in rendering meaning-based products largely at the expense of traditional poetic form. The first (possible) mention of such consultation in these three volumes is Dent-Young’s assertion at several places in his edition of Garcilaso that he has relied at times on Richard Helgerson’s readings in *A Sonnet from Carthage* of the poet’s so-called “Tunisian poems.” What is interesting here is that this relatively brief study is followed by prose translations of these five works by William Gahan and the author, so it is nearly impossible to ascertain to which of these components (if not both) the retranslator is referring. Johnson twice makes mention of earlier translations, citing the rhymed versions of Quevedo by Carl W. Cobb, David Gitlitz, and Barnstone only to distance himself from their method, and later Dent-Young’s “valiant” Góngora translations, so that (presumably) English-language readers of Johnson’s own rendering of Quevedo’s “Contra Góngora” (“Against Góngora”) might

“experience” (in de-poeticized, organic-form English?) the “Latinated diction” that “so incensed Quevedo” (Johnson, 2009: 24, 218). In response to an e-mail query about textual study and translatorial influence, Johnson effectively corroborates his description of this de-historicized approach as it appears in his edition of Quevedo, writing in part:

I would say that I relied much more on the immense corpus of Spanish scholarship on the poems than on the earlier English versions of the poems, most of which I felt ignored the complexity of Quevedo’s conceits, syntax, semantics, and didn’t, alternately, seek to give him a viable lyric voice in English for the early 21st century. (Now whether I succeeded in this last desiderata [sic] I’ll leave to others to judge.) As for the ethos of the translations, it consists mainly in heeding closely Quevedo’s conflicted, now transcendent, now satiric voice, with the idea that it still speaks, with all its historical contingencies, to the present moment. (Johnson, personal communication, 2010)

In short, nowhere does a reader sense that Dent-Young and Johnson seriously retranslated against any specific, prior TTs or that they viewed the poetic form so essential to these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century STs as vital features to be preserved in their English-language versions. Absent, too, is the allowance that an alternative to their own organic method of principally free-verse renderings might have been feasible, desirable or possible in the preparation of their bilingual editions for an early twenty-first-century audience.

Not that errant matches, particularly lexical, between previous TTs and some of their own efforts prove impossible to find. To use one of Quevedo’s well-known Lisi sonnets, “Afectos varios de su corazón fluctuando en las ondas de los cabellos de Lisi” (“Diverse feelings in his heart, floating on the waves of Lisi’s hair”) as an example, Johnson renders the opening line, “En crespa tempestad del oro undoso,” as “In curly storms of wavy gold,” where D. Gareth Walters

writes “Tossed in a curly storm of wavy gold” (Johnson, 2009: 132, 133; Walters, 2006: 53). Referring to the speaker’s heart in the ST’s final tercet, “Avaro y rico y pobre, en el tesoro / el castigo y la hambre imita a Midas, / Tántalo en fugitiva fuente de oro,” Johnson’s version reads “Greedy, rich, and poor, it imitates/ Midas in wealth, hunger, and woe, / Tantalus, with his fleeting fount of gold,” while Walters translates these lines as “Greedy and rich and poor, it imitates / Midas in wealth, in judgment and hunger, and Tantalus in fleeting, golden fount” (Johnson, 2009: 132, 133; Walter, 2006: 53). As Savory and Landers might have attested, there are only so many ways to express, say, “oro undoso,” and these sorts of “fortuitous coincidences” are, indeed, scattered throughout the three volumes.

More noteworthy, if not emblematic of the organic method as a whole are the sustained matches between portions of Dent-Young’s “Eclogue I” of Garcilaso and an earlier TT version of the poem from the 1950s. The lament of the shepherd Nemoroso for his deceased love (ll. 394-407) follows in the Spanish original beside Dent-Young’s organic-form retranslation:

Divina Elisa, pues agora el cielo
 con inmortales pies pisas y mides,
 y su mudanza ves, estando queda,
 ¿por qué de mí te olvidas, y no pides
 que se apresure el tiempo en que este velo
 rompa del cuerpo, y verme libre pueda,
 y en la tercera rueda
 contigo mano a mano
 busquemos otro llano,
 busquemos otros montes y otros ríos,
 otros valles floridos y sombríos,
 donde descanse y siempre pueda verte
 ante los ojos míos,
 sin miedo y sobresalto de perderte?

Divine Elisa, for now it is the sky
 you tread and measure with immortal feet,
 and watch its changes while remaining still,
 have you forgotten me? Why do you not ask
 for that time to come more quickly when this veil
 of the body will be torn and I be free?
 Then in the third heaven
 with you hand in hand,
 we will seek another plain,
 other mountains, other flowing rivers,
 other flowering shady valleys,
 where I can rest forever and ever have you
 before my happy eyes,
 without the fear and shock of losing you.
 (Dent-Young, 2009: 144, 145)

The generalized loss of formal poetic features endemic to the organic method has already been noted. Curious here is this retranslation's persistent correlation with the earlier TT, marked in italics below:

Divine Elisa, since now you tread and measure the sky with immortal feet, and see its changes, being yourself unmoving, why do you forget me, and why do you not beg that the time may come soon when this veil of my body may be rent, and I may find myself free; and that we may in the third sphere, hand in hand, seek another plain, other mountains and rivers, other flowered and shady valleys, where I may rest and always be able to see you before my eyes, without the fear and dread of losing you? (Cohen, 1988: 172)

As should be clear from the format, Cohen's version, with which Dent-Young's retranslation exhibits so much overlap, is one of the aptly named "plain prose translations" in *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*. That these two renderings of all the English-language versions of Garcilaso, Góngora, and Quevedo from the seventeenth century to the present examined for this study should have the most in common, lexically and syntactically (overlooking the occasional transposition), represents the most telling, if not damning indictment of the organic-form strategy in the translation of verse forms. Dent-Young's probity remains above reproach; it is simply his modality as a poetry translator using organic form that is in stark evidence here.

To observe how the ethical issues of imitation, borrowing, and plagiarism formerly more prevalent in poetry retranslation might have played out in the conventional poetics of past centuries, witness the following three versions of the refrain from Góngora's 1609 *letrilla* "No son todos ruseñores": John Bowring's "Not All Sweet Nightingales," originally published in his

1824 volume *Ancient Poetry and Romances of Spain*; Edward Churton's "Not All the Birds Are Nightingales" from 1862, and Alice Jane McVan's "Roundelay" from 1938:

No son todos ruiseñores
los que cantan entre las flores,
sino campanitas de plata,
que tocan a la alba;
sino trompeticas de oro,
que hacen la salva
a los soles que adoro.
(Dent-Young, 2007: 84)

Not all the birds are nightingales,
That sing in flowery downs and dales;
Nor every chime of silver bells,
That to the dawn its greeting tells,
Nor golden trumpets, every one,
Whose peal salutes the golden sun.
(Churton, 1862: 97)

They are not all sweet nightingales,
That fill with songs the flowery vales;
But they are little silver bells,
Touched by the winds in the smiling dells,—
Magic bells of gold in the grove,
Forming a chorus for her I love.
(in Longfellow, 1849: 694)

They are not only nightingales,
They who sing in flowery dales,
But little silver bells that play
 To welcome day,
And little golden horns that blow
 A greeting gay
 To eyes aglow.
(McVan, 1938: 57)

The hundred fourteen or so years separating the three versions nonetheless embrace an essentially similar translatorial poetics as each of these translators employs analogical form, the latter two inviting scrutiny for influence. Again, it is difficult to ascertain whether Churton and/or McVan might have been familiar with an earlier version or versions. Churton regularizes Góngora's inconsistent octosyllables into rhyming iambic tetrameter couplets—does he follow Bowring's lead in this regard? All three translators end their first lines with "nightingales," eliciting a rhyme with "vales" in Bowring's case and "dales" in the versions by Churton and McVan. Was the siren song of sound here too compelling for the latter pair to resist or is the resulting identical rhyme coincidental? Does McVan translate "against" Bowring and Churton, including shorter lines in her version to match Góngora's "broken foot" meter? Finding herself

in the (potentially) enviable position of having two prior TT versions with which to contrast her own (assuming, of course, that she was aware of their existence or cared to know of them), does McVan render the refrain in seven lines, not six, out of reverence to the ST or the desire to differentiate herself from her predecessors? Similar queries inhere in her explicitation of “soles” as “eyes” in the final line, and her “following” (?) Bowring in his rendering of “sino” as “But” and not the somewhat problematical “Nor,” which Churton writes. In any event, analogical form’s manifest respect for ST poetics solicits the sort of historicized comparison of TTs now almost unthinkable in the age of organic form, a method that was “rare until the free-verse forms of the twentieth century” (Kelly, 1979: 192) and in which, problematically, “content is allowed to determine its own form as the translation develops” (Bennani, 1981: 137).

Coda

Writing in 1962, thus again positing the World War II years as the approximate onset of organic-form predominance (reflected now in conventional periodization), Cohen compares the methodology of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century poetry translators with that of the translators of his day: “In contrast to the Victorians and Edwardians, whose antiquated productions are, by a complete reversal of taste, now declared unreadable, craftsmen in the last twenty years have aimed principally at interpretation in current language, even at the risk of reducing individual authors’ styles and national tricks of speech to a plain prose uniformity” (Cohen, 1962: 33). Cohen is correct to qualify this bygone (eminently British) era’s championing of ST poetic values, and his observation sounds a cautionary note for the present study. Should Dent-Young’s and Johnson’s organic-form versions of Garcilaso, Gongora, and Quevedo be considered any more solipsistic—that is, “reflective of their times”—than, say the

“belles infidèles” of seventeenth-century France, the French Romantic penchant for rendering poetry into prose or Pound’s extreme modernization through *logopoeia*? Conversely, should the Victorians be deemed any more heroic for their insistence on Wardour Street English, or the German Romantics for their favoring of foreignness in translation so as to augment the glories of their native tongue? STs inevitably undergo some degree of transformation, even assimilation in becoming their TT analogues, so why should mainly free-verse versions of STs in meter and rhyme occasion such hand-wringing?

Friedrich Nietzsche famously saw translation as a way to calibrate the depth of historical consciousness: the more the translation of a period assimilated STs to TT values, the less a culture could boast a true sense of history. He might easily have written “aesthetic history,” for it is in their lack of recognition and respect for poetic difference that the retranslators in this study, along with their host of domesticating forebears from various periods and cultures, bring this exploration of retranslation back to the ethical sphere. Organic form’s utter disregard for ST poetics continues to sound the alarm in poetry retranslation these days, and not the itchy question of unwarranted borrowing. A call for the return to analogical-form predominance in poetry (re)translation may be one way to offset the deleterious artistic, linguistic, and cultural homogenization under way for decades in Anglo-English practice. Is it really to anyone’s profit that Garcilaso, Góngora, and Quevedo can now be read in a flattened, twenty-first-century American idiom? Robert Eaglestone will have the last word: “To translate the neighbor is to turn him/her/it into a category of our own language and so to deny him/her/its otherness. It is only by approaching the neighbor, the other, as that which we cannot understand or comprehend, or translate, that we act ethically” (Eagleston, 2005: 136).

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