

# SPANISH POETRY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH: THE CASE OF *ENGLAND'S HELICON*

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When considering the antiquity pastoral poetry has as a genre as compared with comedy or tragedy George Puttenham clearly states the following:

I do deny that the Eglogue should be the first and most auncient forme of artificiall Poesie, being persuaded that the Poet devised the Eglogue long after the other dramatic poems, not of purpose to counterfeit or represent the rusticall manner of loves and communication: but under the vaile of homely passions and in rude speeches to insinuate and glauce at greater matters.<sup>46</sup>

If we assume Puttenham's theory to be correct (and we do not have reasons for not doing so) we would then have a very good explanation for the popularity pastoral literature enjoyed for most of the Renaissance in Western Europe.

Pastoral literature and its world of archetypes are very far away from the present day sensibility and it is hardly easy to understand how such a stereotyped production was ever thought to be the touchstone of a writer's talent and capacity. But facts, as Mr. Gradgrind would delight in saying<sup>47</sup>,

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<sup>46</sup> George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ed. Gladys Doidge Willcock & Alice Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P. 1936, rpt. 1970) 38.

<sup>47</sup> "Now what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else" (Ch. Dickens, *Hard Times*, chapter 1).

tend to impose the strength of their rule over preconceived ideas of all kinds and judging on the past (or the future) having our own reality as a starting point is by no means a good guide to apprehend what reality was or is going to be.

But, what do I mean when I say that pastoral literature was popular? Let me take the example of what is probably the most well known Spanish pastoral romance of the time (and, perhaps, the most influential piece of narrative of the genre); I am talking of Jorge de Montemayor's *Los siete libros de la Diana*. The first edition was published in 1559, there is a second printed in Milan in 1560, a third in Zaragoza in the same year, four different ones in Antwerp, Barcelona, Cuenca and Valladolid in 1561... To make a long story short, there were twenty six different editions in Spanish until the end of the 16th century. No less than ten editions in French during the same period and an English translation in 1598<sup>48</sup>. Something of the like is going to happen with Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* in England.

The case is much the same if we turn our attention to poetry. In what is a classical study in the topic, W.W. Greig's *Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama*, the author (in chapter II, the one devoted to pastoral poetry in England) reviews a field from which not a single great name seems to be missing: Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney, Milton, Marlowe... Even though circulation and readership of romances would for the first time make of a book what we could call a "best-seller", as far as genres are concerned poetry is what we are interested in.

Greg underlines the peculiarity the English pastoral has when compared with that of other countries: "On the one hand the spontaneous and popular impulse towards a form of pastoralism appears to have been stronger and more consistent than elsewhere; on the other the foreign and literary

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<sup>48</sup> The actual version had been made in 1581, or 1582, although according to its translator, it had remained a manuscript for nearly twenty years. *Vide* Bartholomew Yong's preface to his translation of the *Dianas* in J.M. Kennedy, *A Critical Edition of Yong's Translation of George of Montemayor's Diana and Gil Polo's Enamoured Diana* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1968).



the indication they afford of the trend of literary fashion"<sup>52</sup>. This is a statement I cannot share in the very least. Could, for instance, the *Shepherds Calendar* ever come to being but as the natural evolution of a movement initiated by Barclay's and Googe's productions to a very great extent (translations themselves) or George Turberville's translation of Mantuan's eclogues (1567)<sup>53</sup>?

In what is, I think, a very accurate description of the actual momentous importance this task of translating had at the time (and this by the pen of a contemporary writer, something we are not going to be able to find in England), J. Peletier, the French theoretician of *La Pléiade*, says: "La plus vraie espèce d'Imitation, c'est de traduire: car imiter n'est autre chose que vouloir faire ce que fait un autre: ainsi que fait le Traducteur qui s'asservit non seulement à l'invention d'autrui, mais aussi à la Disposition: et encore à l'Elocution tant qu'il peut, parce que l'efficace d'un Ecrit, bien souvent consiste en la propriété des mots et locutions: laquelle omise, ôte la grace et défraude le sens de l'Auteur"<sup>54</sup>. The importance of the things said justifies the length of the quotation and makes it worthwhile for serious consideration. In opposition to the apparent unimportance of translations as considered by Greg (if we make an exception of their value as proof of the "trend of literary fashion"), here we find not only the underlining of their importance because of their contents, but also because of the way they are organised and, what matters even more, because of the wording used in them (if you allow me to use such an inexact equivalent of *Elocution as wording is* ). A certain pattern of conventions of metre and rhyme, for instance, is established, which can be used not only when translating but when writing original poetry as well.

And here we come to the point of the translation of poetry: was such an undertaking something frequent in those days? Translation and culture are concepts that mutually refer to each other in the 16th century. During that period at least one out of every five books published in England (some authors could raise the figure to one in four) was a translation either from a classical language or from a vernacular (mainly French, Italian and Spanish).

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<sup>52</sup> Greg, 78.

<sup>53</sup> The first translation of Theocritus' *Idyllia* was not published until 1588.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted by Hélène Nais in "Traduction et imitation chez quelques poètes du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle", *Revue des Sciences Humaines*, tome LII, 180 (Octobre-Décembre 1980) 35.

A hundred volumes out of a total amount of about 2.000 titles<sup>55</sup> were translations from the Spanish. How many of them were translations of poetry? Not a single one. Only a hundred lines by Garcilaso (and some by the Marquis of Santillana) find their way into the English language thanks to Minsheu, in whose dictionary they are included<sup>56</sup>.

But if the interest in translating verse per se seems to have been scarce, this is not the case when we come to consider the very abundant pieces of translated poetry we are going to come across when reading Spanish romances translated into English. Here the abundance is the norm more than the exception. *England's Helicon*, the only anthology of poetry that includes compositions translated from the Spanish is a pastoral exception to the norm. And I say it is a pastoral exception because all those translated poems have as a source three Spanish pastoral romances: Montemayor's *Diana*. Gil Polo's *Diana enamorada*, and Alonso Perez's *Segunda Diana*.

"*England's Helicon* is generally considered the finest of the Elizabethan poetical miscellanies and it draws upon the work of some of the most famous poets of the age"<sup>57</sup>. These are the initial words with which D.E.L. Crane starts his Introductory Note to the Scholar Press facsimile edition of the famous anthology. Published by John Flasket in 1600 (it ran a second edition in 1614), under the patronage of John Bodenham, it pays tribute to the popularity of the genre we have alluded to at the very beginning of this paper. Its undoubted quality is based on the names of its contributors. Let me recall some of them: William Shakespeare, Philip Sidney, Michael Drayton, Christopher Marlowe, and Edmund Spenser. But its most remarkable characteristic (and one that has puzzled critics for years) is that the main contributor to the anthology by far is Bartholomew Yong, with twenty five translations from the Spanish *Dianas*. Yong's translation had been published only two years before (1598). Opinions on the actual reasons for this preeminence are divergent. Bullen, the anthology's first modern

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<sup>55</sup> Vide H. S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers 1475 to 1557 & English Books and Readers 1558-1603* (London: Cambridge U. P. 1970 & 1965 respectively).

<sup>56</sup> John Minsheu, *A Dictionarie in Spanish and English, first published into the English tongue by Ric. Perciuaile Gent. Now enlarged and amplified with many thousand words* (London: 1599).

<sup>57</sup> *England's Helicon (1600)*. A Scholar Press Facsimile with an Introductory Note by D.E.L. Crane (Menston and London: The Scholar Press, 1973).

editor, would even allude to the possibility of the links of friendship between Yong and the compiler<sup>58</sup>. The poems have not been appreciated as being up to the standard of the whole of the anthology, which makes of their abundance a fact all the more surprising. But this is a point we shall look into later on. Let us turn our attention to the actual approach to the work the translator made use of by concentrating on the texts.

The whole affair of translating poetry is so complex and opinions and ideas on the topic are so varied and divergent that it would be impossible (and out of the question) to try summarize them here. I am going to use a quotation from Paul Selver's *The Art of Translating Poetry* as a starting point for the brief analysis that follows.

"What are the main ingredients of a poem? These three seem to provide a working analysis:

1. Its actual contents or subject-matter.
2. Its rhythmic structure.
3. Its verbal effects, including some features as musical qualities, subtleties of style, and so forth."<sup>59</sup>

Yong made a daring choice when he decided to translate poetry for poetry and not use prose instead. In the Preface to his translation of the *Dianas* Yong had declared, when acknowledging the knew the French translations (that must have had a wide circulation at the time -we have to keep in mind that Elizabethans had an easier access to French and its book market than to Spanish-), "the first Part to be exquisite; the other two corruptly done with a confusion of verse into Prose"<sup>60</sup>. Obviously, from his words we can see he never even imagined having done otherwise but trying his hand at translating the Spanish original into English verse. Not an easy

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<sup>58</sup> "Possibly Bartholomew Yong (an unpoetical name) may even find here and there an admirer; but in my judgement he seldom rises above, and not seldom falls below, mediocrity. The selections (of the poems included in *Englands Helicon*) are made for the most part with such excellent taste that the constant occurrence of Yong's name can only be explained on the assumption that he was a close friend of the indulgent editor", *Englands Helicon*, (Ed.) A.H. Bullen (London: 1887).

<sup>59</sup> Paul Selver, *The Art of Translating Poetry* (London: John Baker, 1966) 21.

<sup>60</sup> J.M. Kennedy, 6.

task at all when we consider that the Spanish romances embody an incredible variety of metres and rhyme patterns, which makes of them a kind of practical handbook in the art of metrics.

We have no evidence that Yong wrote poetry of his own: having the taste for letters he had and the ability he shows in producing translations from the Spanish, he undoubtedly must have written some. Otherwise, his first attempt (this of his translation from the *Dianas* ) could not have been so successful. His version carefully imitates the structure of the rhyme in the originals, if we make an exception of the quatrains with rhyme *abba* that are systematically changed into *abab*. There is a tendency towards longer English solutions and we can say, in this sense, that the translated poems grow as compared with their originals. Yong tries to account for all of his model in his own version. Such is the case, for instance, of the poem that glosses the famous verse.

Guarda mi las Vaccas  
Carillo, por tu fe,  
Besa mi Primero,  
Yo te las Guardare.

Alonso Perez, in his *Segunda Diana*, would write seven eight-line stanzas of octosyllables from that starting point. The sixth, in the mouth of the shepherd Cariso, reads

En extremo eres hermosa,  
Y en extremo braua y dura:  
O si fuesses tan piadosa  
Como muestra tu figura.  
Si tu rostro me assegura,  
Y me espanta tu crueldad,  
En tanta contrariedad  
Que remedio buscaré.<sup>61</sup>

For which we have *two* stanzas in English

O in extreame thou art mos faire,

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<sup>61</sup> Alonso Perez, *Segunda Parte de la Diana de George de Montemayor*, (Anvers: Pedro Bellerio, 1581) fol. 175 r.

And in extreame vniust despaire  
 Thy cruelty maintaines:  
 O that hou wert so pittifull  
 Vnto these torments that doo pull  
 My soule with sencelesse paines,  
 As thou shew'st in that face of thine:  
 Where pittie and mild grace should shine

If that thy faire and sweetest face  
 Assureth me both peace and grace,  
 Thy hard and cruel hart:  
 Which in that white breast thou doo'st beare,  
 dooth make me tremble yet for feare  
 Thou wilt not end my smart.  
 In contraries of such kind:  
 Tell me what succour shall I finde?<sup>62</sup>

The English is common measure (eights and sixes) in which the rhyme structure has varied from *ababbccd* (coplas de arte menor ) to *aabccdee*. Yong would usually make recourse to common measure, iambic pentametres for Spanish endecasyllables, iambic trimetres and pentametres for Spanish coplas reales (10 octosyllable verses in two five line stanzas rhyming *abaabcdccd* ) and so son. He is continually striving to find an equivalent to the form of the Spanish (one that is acceptable in English). In this task he had to deal with what were imported pastoral poetry metres in Spanish like *octavas reales* (introduced in Spanish upon the model of Bocaccio), translating them into English iambic pentametres, just as he does in this poem from Alonso Perez's first book:

Quien gusta del manjar del dios Cupido,  
 De pasto a su appetito quando quiera:  
 Ai aliuio en sus beuidas ha sentido,  
 A su plazer amate su sed fiera:  
 Y si sus armas bien le han parecido,  
 Siga el tal su estandarte, y su vadera:  
 Que yo en hallarme del libre y essento,  
 Estoy allegre, vfano y muy contento.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> All the quotations from *England's Helicon* are taken from the 1973 edition of the Scolar Press (no pagination).

<sup>63</sup> A. Perez, fol. 10 r.



Who hath of Cupids cates and dainties prayed,  
 May feed his stomack with them at his pleasure:  
 If in his drinke some ease he hath assayed,  
 Then let him quench his thirsting without measure:  
 And if his weapons pleasant in their manner,  
 Let him embrace his standard and his banner.  
 For being free from him, and quite exempted:  
 Ioyfull I am, and proud, and well contented.

But he also did very well when tackling the difficulties of metres that had lain in the oblivion of Spanish literature for centuries<sup>64</sup>. Running the risk of tiring you with long textual quotations I include what is one of the best examples of the richness of rhythms in these translations (from Gil Polo's *Diana enamorada*, an epithalamion song on the occasion of Sirenus' wedding).

De flores matizadas se vista el verde prado,  
 retumbe el hueco bosque de voces deleitosas,  
 olor tengan más fino las coloradas rosas,  
 floridos ramos mueva el veinto sossegado.  
 El río apressurado  
 sus aguas acreciente,  
 y pues tan libre queda la fatigada gente  
 del congoxoso llanto,  
 moved hermosas ninfas, regozijado canto.<sup>65</sup>

Let now each Meade with flowers be depainted,  
 Of sundry colours sweetest odours glowing:  
 Roses yeeld foorth your smells so finely tainted,  
 Calme winds the green leaues moouue with gentle blowing,  
 The Christall Riuers flowing  
 With waters be encreased:  
 And since each one from sorrow now hath ceased,  
 From mournfull plains and sadnes.  
 Ring foorth faire Nymphs your ioyfull Songs for gladnes.

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<sup>64</sup> "Tras un destierro de casi dos siglos, el alejandrino reapareció en una canción del libro cuarto de la *Diana* de Gil Polo", in Tomás Navarro Tomás, *Métrica española* (Madrid, Barcelona: Guadarrama, 1974) 225.

<sup>65</sup> Gaspar Gil Polo, *Diana enamorada* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1973), p. 206.

The Spanish original is formed by a group of 7 nine-line stanzas in which verses 5, 6, and 8 are heptasyllabic and the rest Alexandrine. The English keeps the same number of stanzas interweaving pentametre and trimetre lines. The result is so interesting that Susanne Woods, for instance, in her well known essay on English versification from Chaucer to Dryden, would include it as an example of "the late Elizabethan attempt at euphonious variety in both strophic construction and linear rhythm"<sup>66</sup>.

When deciding upon the supremacy of form Yong had to subordinate Selver's points one and three (contents and verbal effects) to what was priority n.º 1: rhythmic structure. But as we had the chance of announcing some lines before he would not give up his attempt of accounting for every constituent element of the original without a fight. In this sense, we are obliged to acknowledge that after a thorough comparison of the twenty five original poems and their translations we have been unable to trace omissions of any serious importance. On the few occasions in which we come across a line that has simply been dropped there is a compensatory movement on the part of the translator that restores equivalence. Let us consider, for instance, his version of this stanza from Perez's *Diana* (Book VI):

La vida me faltara	Pale Atropos my vitall string
Mas no aura falta en amarte:	Shall cut, and life offend:
El río atras boluera,	The streames shall first turne to their
	spring.
El cielo se parará,	The world shall end, and euery thing,
Antes que pueda olvidarte. <sup>67</sup>	Before my loue shall end.

The translator introduces a metaphor, geminating the first line, and compensating in this way the omission of "Mas no aura falta en amarte", the contents of which anyway are redundant since the last line conveys the same basic meaning.

There is in Yong's work a permanent tendency to enlarge the translated texts in comparison to their originals. That is a phenomenon we have already pointed out. An evident desire of making things clear for the

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<sup>66</sup> Susanne Woods, *Natural emphasis. English versification from Chaucer to Dryden* (San Marino: The Nuntington Library, 1984) 196.

<sup>67</sup> A. Perez, fol. 172 r.

reader is apparent throughout his work: of course, the temptation of adding innovations of his own creation shows from time to time here and there but, in general terms, the new bits and pieces are usually based on the context basically redundant and come to add to a prose that in itself tends to be slow in movement. The same principle applies to poetry, although there we find extra powerful reasons to justify this procedure. The choice of metre and rhythm determines the adding of fragments that can fill the voids in patterns. This factor and the translator's will to preserve every nuance in the contents of the original make for the growth translated texts undergo. Occasionally they offer an easy way of finding a rhyme (Perez's *Diana*, Book VI):

No es possible qu'en amar	Impossible it is ( <b>my friend</b> )
Pueda ser yo procedido	That any one should excell
Qualquiera sera vencido	In loue, whose loue I will ressell
Si conmigo ha de lidiar	If that with me he will contend:
Es mi amor sin tener par... <sup>68</sup>	My loue no equal hath, <b>nor end.</b>

And lastly, what is the opinion we can form on Yong's attempt at imitating and preserving the verbal effects of the originals? Jakobson was very clear when signalling paronomasia as the touchstone of any translation of poetry. Verbal effects, being intimately and inextricably linked to every tongue make our efforts to preserve them in a different one a task bound to fail. In the case of Yong's translations he is very aware of tropes, which are usually solved with ease. What Jakobson calls *paronomasia* suffers modifications depending ultimately on the needs of the metre and the rhyme or on the degree of awareness of such phenomena the translator has. Sometimes the demands of contents and form prove to be too much for Yong. Take, for instance, the case of the following stanza in which the alliteration of the velar voiceless plosive is not reproduced in English:

¿Qué desseaste alcançar	What didst thou wish, tell me (sweete Louer)
que tal contento te diesse?	Whereby thou might'st such ioy recouer?
-Querer a quin me quisiesse	To loue where loue should be inspired:
que no hay más que dessear. <sup>69</sup>	Since there's no more to be devised.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, fol 169 a.

<sup>69</sup> Jorge de Montemayor, *Los siete libros de la Diana* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1970).

Summing up now the brief notes on Yong's technical assumptions and the characteristics of his work as a translator we can affirm that his first priority is formal as

1. He makes decisions of metre and rhyme to which he subordinates contents. The archetypal world of pastoral literature demands an open avowal to established conventions and Yong's decisions as far as these formal conventions are concerned seem to be the right ones. The inclusion of his poems in *England's Helicon* and the fact that there are no other references to authorship but those of the name of the translator at the bottom of the page are good proof that his translations read as originals<sup>70</sup>.

2. Contents are preserved as far as possible. Solutions systematically longer than the originals try to reconcile the demands of metre with those of fidelity to the source texts.

3. Opinions on the quality of his work have been biased after Bullen's statement doubting on the convenience of his *overpresence* in the anthology. Much of the blame in this field has to be put on the actual Spanish poems (especially those by Perez). I agree with Rollins when he says that "Yong's twenty-five poems are translations, and as such they are not at all below the Elizabethan standard (...). Yong's *Diana* was the most readily accessible storehouse of pastoral songs, none of them objectionably bad: to pick from them a large number was the most natural thing any editor could have done"<sup>71</sup>.

What really matters when judging on this topic is that his poems found a place in the system of the target literature. There is no better praise for a translator.

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<sup>70</sup> The only translation from Montemayor's *Diana* by Sir Philip Sidney included in the anthology (that of "¡Cabellos, quanta mudança!") show this legend: "translated by S. Phil. Sidney, out of *Diana* of Montmaior".

<sup>71</sup> *England's Helicon (1600-1614)*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1935), 2 vols.