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0300167177.

Every poetic translator worth our attention is, as it were, a secondary artist, one who attempts to employ his own art in order to illuminate something in the original, something he has grown to love deeply. He then is no traitor, as the overused Italian saying has it, but a hander-on, a giver of as much of the beloved that he can give. If one were to craft a portrait of a lovely woman, it would not be a photographic image, but rather an artistic rendering of her inner person, her soul, shining through the eyes, the face, the hands, the posture. All this is not to say that the painter, much less the translator, may simply indulge himself and do as he pleases. The words of John the Baptist, I believe, still apply: the poet I translate must increase, and I must decrease. But the manner in which those words will be put into practice depends upon what is seen, and that in turn depends largely upon love.

Therefore, when a lover of poetry as sensitive and intelligent as C. S. Lewis provides us a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, we should pay attention, not necessarily because it is going to be the best translation according to this or that criterion, but because he will inevitably show us something in the original that we had missed, or that we had not seen in quite that way. Here is an example, from Book One. Juno has bribed the wind god, Aeolus, to let loose a tempest against the ships of Aeneas and the Trojans. But when the sea god Neptune discovers it, he threatens the rebellious winds and calms the ocean. Virgil interrupts the scene with his first epic simile, one that clearly refers us to the calming of the fractious Roman state by Caesar Augustus:

As when in mighty commonwealths the rascal crowd
Stirred to rebellion raises oft their voice aloud,
And ready to their mischief find both fire and stone,
If chance some graver citizen, for merits known,
Pass by, they strain to hear him and are silent all,
And at his words, corrected, their wild passions fall:
So fell the rage of waters when their father's eye

Looked forth.

Here Lewis employs a fine run of alliteration to link ideas: it is because the crowd is “rascal”—*ignobile*—that they are roused to “rebellion”—*seditio*—and find fire and stone “ready.” But when the “graver citizen” appears, says Lewis, picking up alliteration to be found in Virgil, they “strain to hear him and are silent all,” with the silence and the strain working together as part of a moral return to sanity. They are “corrected,” Lewis’ choice for the verb *regit*, “he rules” – literally, “he steers them right.”

It’s a muscular and evocative rendering, of the sort to be found quite often in the recently published translation. (It should be noted that the work is fragmentary; Lewis translated Book One, the first half of Book Two, about 250 lines from the underworld scenes in Book Six, and a few scattered lines elsewhere.) In some ways – in its energy, and in its elevation of the scene to national importance – it is superior to, say, that of Robert Fitzgerald, my choice for the *Aeneid* in the courses I teach:

When rioting breaks out in a great city,
And the rampaging rabble goes so far
That stones fly, and incendiary brands –
For anger can supply that kind of weapon --
If it so happens they look round and see
Some dedicated public man, a veteran
Whose record gives him weight, they quiet down,
Willing to stop and listen.
Then he prevails in speech over their fury
By his authority, and placates them.

The Fitzgerald version sometimes holds closer to the Latin: “stones fly”—*saxa volant*—and “anger”—*furor*—is retained as the sinister subject of its sentence. It is in general a good deal more precise, more inclusive of a variety of meanings implicit in the Latin. It is also, unfortunately, smoother, even perhaps, to its detriment, matter-of-fact. What Lewis calls a “graver citizen,” Fitzgerald calls, employing a typical circumlocution, “some dedicated public man,” and both are trying, and of course failing, to render an account of the Latin *pietate*, with its sweeping range of meanings: piety, duty to the father, patriotism, reverence for ancestors, and even, in Virgil, compassion for poor suffering mankind.

I have chosen this passage because it illustrates at once both success and failure, the love that sees, and the human limitations that cause us to overlook what might be

seen. The words *pietas* and *furor*, in their various forms, are leitmotifs in the *Aeneid*. They become really ponderous in the significance they gain from their use in one context after another. Thus in the proem to the epic, Virgil wonders aloud why Juno would harass Aeneas, the *insignem pietate virum*, literally, the man who bore the banner of piety. How to bring across the political implications of the word? Fitzgerald calls him “a man apart, devoted to his mission,” but Lewis drops the political and considers the soul instead, calling him “a man so good.” The problem is that such phrases cannot, without artistic blemish, be used again, so that when in a near-rhyme Virgil presents us later with the imaginary man settling the crowds, the *pietate gravem . . . virum*, Lewis can only focus on the man’s gravity, and Fitzgerald, upon his dedication, and thus we lose the fascinating connections between Aeneas, Neptune, and Augustus Caesar, and the implied connection between Juno and civil insurrection.

Let me choose another word to illustrate the point: *memor*. It literally means “to be mindful of,” “remembering,” “mulling,” “recalling.” It suggests persistence; in the *Aeneid*, it is used of Juno, to describe a seething, never-forgetting, brooding, insult-nursing hatred. So Aeneas is said to suffer *saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram*, “on account of the savage wrath of ever-remembering Juno,” as I might put it, with a little poetic license. A few lines later, Juno is said to be *veteris memor . . . belli*, “remembering the old war” at Troy, with other insults to her dignity lodged deep in her mind, *alta mente repostum*. Now this business of remembering is problematic, because when Virgil himself calls upon the Muses to bring the ancient story of Aeneas and of Juno’s enmity to mind, he uses the verbal form of that same word: *Musa, mihi causas memora*: “recall to my mind the causes, Muse.” How do our translators render these forms of remembering? Fitzgerald translates the verb as “tell”: “Tell me the causes now, O Muse.” Juno attacks Aeneas in her “sleepless rage,” a phrase that does nicely bring out the brooding, but that loses the sense of memory. When Juno thinks about the Trojan War, however, Fitzgerald says that she holds it “in memory.” Lewis translates the verb as “say”: “Say from what slighted majesty, O Muse.” He too loses the sense of memory in describing Juno’s wrath: Aeneas suffers “for angry Juno’s sake.” But again, when Juno thinks about the war, we encounter the mulling and brooding: “[Juno] her old grudge recalls, / Remembering . . .” In short, there’s a subtle artistic strand woven through the first thirty lines of the poem, a strand in the color of memory, and neither translator finds a way to show it to us.

That’s the breaks, I might say. That’s why we study the original language. What Lewis does for us, Fitzgerald does also, and that is to show us something of the beauty and the complexity of Virgil’s poem. They do not show the same things; they

do not, nor could they, show all that is to be seen. It is clear that C. S. Lewis entered deeply into the poetic ambience of the *Aeneid*, its mysterious literary mood, and that he did his best to reveal the very strangeness of Virgil in an English meter, alexandrine couplets, that is itself strange and haunting. For that we should be grateful.

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