

Fernando Pessoa's English Sonnets.

A note on a Spanish translation.

(in Spanish)

Jorge Wiese-Rebagliati

Probably the greatest difficulty one meets on translating Fernando Pessoa's English sonnets into Spanish is not only –as obvious as this would be– translating proteic Pessoa, but translating Shakespeare through Pessoa. As the *Times Literary Supplement* reviewer observed at the time (September, 1918), “The sonnets [...] will interest many by reason of their ultra-Shakespearean Shakespeareanisms [...]”.

In being faithful to this complexity, Jorge Wiese's version has not incurred into lexical archaism. Wiese has preferred to maintain the “Tudor tricks of repetition, involution and antithesis” [TLS] as signs of the poems' origins. He has also chosen clarity in imagery and semantics over the original's conceptual density. In the whole, the result expresses the world of a Shakespearean Pessoa viewed through the lenses of a contemporary Latin American writer.

Fernando Pessoa

English Sonnets, a selection.

(translated by Jorge Wiesz-Rebagliati)

I

Whether we write or speak or are but seen
We are ever unapparent. What we are
Cannot be transfused into word or mien.
Our soul from us is infinitely far.
However much we give our thoughts the will
To make our soul with arts of self-show stored,
Our hearts are incommunicable still.
In what we show ourselves we are ignored.
The abyss from soul to soul cannot be bridged
By any skill of thought or trick for seeing.
Unto our very selves we are abridged
When we would utter to our thought our being.
 We are our dreams of ourselves, souls by gleams,
 And each to each other dreams of others' dreams.

Ya escribamos, seamos vistos o hablemos,
Nunca nos expresamos. Lo que somos
Traducir no alcanzan palabra o gesto.
Nuestra alma huye infinita de nosotros.
Aunque al pensamiento mucho alentamos
A guardar el alma en públicas artes,
El corazón late incomunicado.
Exhibirnos ignorados nos hace.
No se cierra entre alma y alma el abismo
Por arte de ingenio o truco de vista.
Compendios somos de nosotros mismos
Cuando nuestro ser decirse querría.
 Fulgores de alma, somos sueños de nuestros
 Sueños. Y cada uno del otro el sueño.

XXIV

Something in me was born before the stars
And saw the sun begin from far away.
Our yellow, local day on its wont jars,
For it hath communed with an absolute day.
Through my Thought's night, as a worn robe's heard trail
That I have never seen, I drag this past
That saw the Possible like a dawn grow pale
On the lost night before it, mute and vast.
It dates remoter than God's birth can reach,
That had no birth but the world's coming after
So the world's to me as, after whispered speech,
The cause-ignored sudden echoing of laughter.
 That't has meaning my conjecture knows,
 But that't has a meaning's all its meaning shows.

Algo en mí nació antes que las estrellas
Y vio al primer sol surgir a lo lejos.
Las luces del día en vaso ardieron presas,
El día común en absoluto vuelto.
Por la noche de mi mente, en jirones,
Por ciega ruta, arrastro ese pasado
Que al pálido Posible vio en albores
En la amplia noche previa, mudo y vasto.
Que el nacer de Dios mucho más antiguo,
Que no nació y al que sucedió el mundo,
Así me es el mundo, que sigue al silbo
Del verbo, eco de un carcajeo confuso.
 Que significa, conjetura sabe;
 No más, que el significado huye aparte.

XXVI

The world is woven all of dream and error
And but one sureness in our truth may lie
That when we hold to aught our thinking's mirror
We know it not by knowing it thereby.
For but one side of things the mirror knows,
And knows it colded from its solidness.
A double lie its truth is; what it shows
By true show's false and nowhere by true place.
Though clouds our life's day-sense with strangeness, yet
Never from strangeness more than it's strange
Doth buy our perplexed thinking, for we get
But the word's sense from words- knowledge, truth, change.
 We know the world is false, not what is true.
 Yet we think on, knowing we ne'er shall know.

Tejido está el mundo de error y sueño.
Y una certeza sola en verdad yace:
Que asiendo del pensamiento el espejo,
De él se sabe al no saber que se sabe.
Solo sabe el espejo de su lado,
Sabe el lado duro, la parte helada.
Mentira doble es su verdad; y su acto,
De verdad, en su mismo actuar engaña.
Y aunque al día nube extrañe el sentido,
Nunca más extraña es nuestra extrañeza
Que en nuestro perplejo acto discursivo,
Pues solo en verbo el sentido ente apresa
 -Conocimiento, verdad...-. Falso el mundo,
 Y aún así ilamos, de ignorar seguros.

XXXV

Good. I have done. My heart weighs. I am sad.
The outer day, void statue of lit blue,
Is altogether outward, other, glad
At mere being not-I (so my aches construe).
I, that have failed in everything, bewail
Nothing this hour but that I have bewailed,
For in the general fate what is 't to fail?
Why, fate being past for Fate, 'tis but to have failed.
Whatever hap or stop, what matters it,
Sith to the mattering our will bringheth nought?
With the higher trifling let us world our wit,
Conscious that, if we do't, that was the lot
 The regular stars bound us to, when they stood
 Godfathers to our birth and to our blood.

Bien. Lo hice. El corazón pesa. Estoy triste.
El día externo, de azul estatua hueca,
Es, en conjunto, exterior, otro, ríe
Solo de no ser yo (infiere mi pena).
Yo, que he fallado en todo, me lamento.
Mi lamento, y nada más, en este año.
Pues, ¿qué es fallar, si hay un destino pleno?
Claro, si fatal es pasado de Hado,
La falla es mera falla. ¿Azar qué importa
O freno, si la voluntad no es nada?
Alta insignificancia ingenio imponga:
Sea esta conciencia destino y marca
 A los que fijas estrellas nos ligan
 De nuestro nacer y sangre madrinas.