FOUR TRANSLATIONS OF "THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND": A LINGUISTIC APPRAISAL

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ABSTRACT

Hopkins is a difficult poet for translators and his *The Wreck of The Deutschland* is his most difficult poem, albeit an indispensable poem in the canons of English poetry. There have been few translations of it into Spanish. This article examines from a linguistic standpoint four different renderings into Spanish of *The Wreck* ..., concentrating on the famous fourth stanza, and formulating opinions about the approach and performance of the different interpretations.

If there is one modern English poet that readers and much more so translators are wary of approaching, that is Gerard Manley Hopkins. And if there is one poem of this author that entails more difficulty than the others, that is *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. Yet, it is one of the poems that cannot be overlooked, in the same way that we can overlook, say, *Under Milk Wood* or *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust*, when we are considering the history of English poetry

The Wreck of The Deutschland, was written a century and a quarter ago, yet there are surprisingly few translations into Spanish of what is generally recognized as Hopkins' greatest poem and one of the landmarks of English poetry in general. This lack of translations is both surprising and explicable. It is surprising in the first place given the importance of the poem and of the poet in the canon of English Literature, and in the second place, given the affinity of the theme with that of much of Spanish poetry: poetry of the religious or mystical kind abounds in Spanish literature from before the time of San Juan de la Cruz to Miguel de Unamuno and after. On the other hand, the lack of translations is

explicable due to the simple fact that the poem is difficult and idiosyncratic. I will come back to this point in a moment, but first I would like to elaborate a little more on the surprising lack of translations.

Hopkins' poem was, as I said, written a century and a quarter ago, yet I have been able to trace only two translations into Spanish and one into Catalan, in the catalogues of the Biblioteca Nacional Española, in Madrid. The three references are: 1) Gerard Manley Hopkins: Antología bilingüe: traducción y estudio preliminar, by Manuel Linares Megías, published in Seville (1978); 2) EL Naufragio del Deutschland y otros poemas: edición bilingüe; by Emilio del Río, published in Madrid (1984) – both the above are in Spanish, (Castellano) – and, 3) El Naufragí del Deutschland – Versió i Pròleg, by Isidre Martínez Marzo, Valencia (1992) – this last is in Catalan. Of course there may be more translations into Spanish of Hopkins' poem, which are not catalogued in the Spanish National Library. Two cases in point are the book, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Poemas: Versión y prólogo, by Edison Simons, published in Madrid (1974), and the translation by M.a Jesús Pérez Martín, published in 1971, in ES, the literary Review of the Department of English of Valladolid University, titled El Naufragio del Deutschland; una interpretación (1). Both of these are in Spanish (Castellano) and I propose to compare these two together with the translations by Manuel Linares Megías and Emilio del Río.

The point I am making, in any case, is that the Hopkins poem, given its importance, is surprisingly little translated into Spanish. Granted that it was not brought out in book form until 1918, when it was first published by Robert Bridges, yet it antedates both *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* by four years. Both these mould-breaking works suppose difficulties for the translator equal to or greater than *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, and this is especially the case of *Ulysses*, yet Joyce's novel, under the title, *Ulises*, has been translated three times into Spanish – by Salas Subirat, published in Buenos Aires in 1974, by José M.ª Valverde, published in Barcelona in 1984, and latterly by García Tortosa published in Madrid in 1999. Eliot's poem, in the same period has been translated, under the title, *La tierra baldía*, at least four times into Spanish, and even once into Bable, the dialect of Asturias, under the title of *La tierra ermo*.

Translation has been a mainstay of Spanish letters for many centuries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the bulk of the translations were from the French, because the main literary currents flowed from that country. But in the past century the majority of translations into Spanish from any language and on

⁽¹⁾ Since this was written, I've come acros another translation which I was unable to include in this study. It is *La Poesía de Gerard Manley Hopkins*, by Salvador Elizondo, Libros de Umbral, Talipan, México, (1999).

any subject are logically from English. These translations, like translations anywhere, are sometimes good, sometimes bad or, in the majority of cases, fairly correctly done but totally insipid and unmemorable. Up until recent times practically no attention was paid to the science, or the art, of translation in Spain; translations were done as the whim took the translator or as the needs of the market stipulated, and the finished work was rarely subjected to the scrutiny of informed critics with a good knowledge of the source language. But things are changing; there are now Departments or Faculties of Translation in many Spanish universities —Madrid, Granada, Salamanca, Valladolid, etc., etc.— the teaching of English in the schools is compulsory from the age of five, (and is soon to be from the age of three); there are numerous academies and translation-agencies dotted throughout all the big cities and the people travel more frequently to English–speaking countries. Also, the reading public is better informed and more demanding; standards are expected to be attained and maintained, and they generally are except in the cases of translations of authors like Agatha Cristie, or Barbara Cartland, where more or less anything goes.

Let us now return to the subject of Hopkins and specifically to that of translations done of him into English and at the same time let's look at the three categories of translators mentioned by Nabakov in his "The Art of Translation", published in 1941.

Nabakov categorizes possible translators as 1) *the scholar*, who, he says, "commits fewer blunders than the drudge, but who must have in addition to learning and diligence, some imagination and style", 2) *the well-meaning hack*, who "laboriously strings words, phrases and sentences together in intelligible but stylistically-barren ways", and 3) *the professional writer*, who "may miss the point in the translation because he lacks the scholar's insight, or who may tend to dress up the real author to look like himself ⁽²⁾.

Hopkins, because he is *first*, a poet, *second*, a difficult poet and *third*, for all his importance, of interest, I'd say, only to a minority, has been favoured with the attention only of the scholar-type translator. The four translations I propose to compare were done by the academic-type translator; not by professional writers and certainly not by "hacks": M. a Jesús Pérez Martín was Professor of English Literature at the University of Valladolid until recently and Manuel Linares Megías is a member of the Society of Jesus, who has written extensively on Hopkins and his work. Of the other two translators I have no biographical knowledge, but judging by what they have produced, the translations are obviously a "labour of love", though the results may not always do justice to the original. The four

⁽²⁾ Quoted by NIDA, Eugene, in his *Towards a Science of Translating*, Brill, Leiden, (1964), pp. 152-3.

translations, then, though different in their approach, are quite faithful either to the spirit or the letter of the original, and in the best of the cases to both, though that by Pérez Martín, as I hope to show, is the better translation in almost all respects. Pérez Martín and Linares Megías were in many senses pioneers in their field: the translation by the former of the *Wreck of the Deutschland*, written in 1971, is the first into Spanish of that poem, and the anthology by Linares Megías is the only one to date of Hopkins' complete poetic *ouevre*. Emilio del Río, together with his co-translator, Angel Martínez Baigorri, include only nine poems of Hopkins in their book, while Edison Simons in his book translates seventeen poems of Hopkins together with fourteen extracts from his diaries and five extracts from his letters.

Translating poetry is at the same time one of the easiest and the most difficult types of literary translation, and it is the kind to which those with a bent for literary translation generally first turn their hand, very often at university in student magazines. It is easy in the sense that a poem may be short, even extremely short, and yet be a complete text, which "says something" and fills its translator with the satisfaction that he or she has doen something of import, has, in a sense, assisted at a new birth. But it is also difficult, as all translation is difficult. To quote Eugene Nida, in his book *Towards a Science of Translating*,

"The translator's task is essentially a difficult and often a thankless one ... successful translating involves one of the most complex intellectual challenges known to mankind" (3).

Poetry translation, like any translation, must comply with the four basic requirements, mentioned by Nida: (4)

- 1) It must make sense
- 2) It must convey the spirit and manner of the original
- 3) It must have a natural and easy form of expression
- 4) It must produce a similar response

And, if we add another: "It must also read like poetry", we can see the almost unsurmountable difficulty it entails. Yet, poetry translation is an extremely popular pastime because it always offers challenges which test the translator's ingenuity and which are met with greater or lesser success.

Criticizing a translation or contrasting two or more translations with the original or with each other is a much less challenging and, maybe, even an unfair

⁽³⁾ Ibid. p. 153.

⁽⁴⁾ Ibid. p. 164.

pastime. Yet that is what I propose to do here, not with any sense of being an expert in the field and much less so considering that the target language is not my own, but in the hope of pointing out a few things. I have not enough space to consider the four complete translations of *The Wreck of The Deutschland;* I will rather mention some of their formal differences and similarities and concentrate on what Seamus Heaney in his article "The Fire 'i the Flint …" calls "… the famous fourth stanza … where the protagonist has emerged from the experience, at once terrible and renovating of Christ's sudden irruption into his life" (5).

The format of the four translations, as I mentioned before, is different. That by Pérez Martín is published in a literary review and the other three in a book. Three of the translations are in parallel texts, with the original and the translation on facing pages, but that by Edison Simons is a single-language text. And here I may say that presenting a translation in a parallel text is an act of bravery when not of foolhardiness, as a reader with some knowledge of both the source and target languages may more easily fall to marvelling at the ingenuousness rather than the ingenuity of the translator. Yet, I must also say that the final result of the three parallel text translations of *The Wreck* ... is on the whole, satisfactory.

The translations by Pérez Martín and Linares Megías contain expalnatory notes, in the case of the former, extremely copious, lengthy explanations, and in that of the latter, much briefer and fewer, there being eighteen in all the poem. Neither the translations by Emilio del Río nor Edison Simons contain notes of any kind, which I think is an important omission, as Hopkins is a poet who requires explication. Consequently, the number of pages devoted by each to the translated poem differs widely, from the seventeen pages in Edison Simons' single-language text to the massive 156 pages which the Pérez Martín translation takes up, principally with her interpretations. In fact, she titles her translation "El Naufragio del Deutschland; una interpretación"; the other three title theirs simply "El Naufragio del Deutschland"

Hopkins' poem, as you well know, opens with a dedication:

To the happy memory of five Fransiscan nuns exiles by the Falck Laws drowned between midnight and morning of Dec. 7th, 1875

and it is divided into two parts, which the author terms "Part The First", with ten stanzas, and "Part The Second", with twenty-five. One of the translators, Pérez

⁽⁵⁾ HEANEY, Seamus, "The Fire i' the Flint ..." in *Preoccupations*, Faber, (1980), p. 89.

Martín, doesn't translate the Dedication or the title, "Part The First", though she does translate "Part The Second". The other three translate the Dedication, but only one of them, Edison Simons, respects the the line-lengths used by the author. It is he also who translates more correctly the words "exiles" and "Falck Laws", by "exiladas" (which should really be "exiliadas"), and "Leyes Falck", with capital letters and without the preposition "de". The other two, Linares Megías and Emilio del Río, translate "exiles" by "desterradas", which really means "exiled", and "Falck Laws" by "leyes de Falk", with a small letter for "Leyes", and with the preposition "de". Both Edison Simons and Emilio del Río respect Hopkins' use of inversion in translating the terms "Part the First" and "Part the Second" with "Parte Primera" and "Parte Segunda" respectively. Linares Megías translates the first term without inversion as "Primera Parte" but uses inversion for the second, "Parte Segunda" Pérez Martín translates only the term "Part The Second", which she calls "Segunda Parte" without making use of inversion.

These are slight but niggling differences and omissions, though there is no reason why they should exist, since it is the translators' duty to make sure that his version respects the original as fully as possible. It is however the body of the translation that is important and in which we can see how well the translator goes about his or her task. Hopkins' poem is of 35 stanzas of eight lines each which rhyme ABABCBCA and with a determined number of stresses in each of the lines. He also makes great use of metaphor, alliteration, neologisms and, above all, of grammatical conversion, which Robert Bridges felt caused his verse to be obscure. Bridges said:

"English swarms with words that have one identical form for substantive, adjective and verb and such a word should never be so placed as to allow of any doubt as to what part of speech it is used for; because such ambiguity or momentary uncertainty destroys the force of the sentence..."

As F.R. Leavis commented, "This criticism assumes that poetry ought to be immediately comprehensible" and, of course, there is no reason why it ought. In fact it is this very use of converted words as well as some coinings and dialect words that gives Hopkins' verse its vigour. Now, grammatical conversion is practically non-existent in Spanish, with the infrequent exception of adjectives or verbs being converted into nouns. For instance, one can say: "El *joven* pidió un *corto*" = "The young man asked for a small glass of beer", where the adjectives "joven" and "corto" are converted into nouns, or "Tiene un *andar* pausado" = He has an unhurried walk (or gait). This latter is a case of an infinitive being converted into a substantive. But substantives, adjectives, adverbs or prepositions are not used as verbs, nor are nouns ever converted into adjectives as they can freely be in English. Wordcoining is also frowned upon in Spanish, something which makes it difficult for the

person who has to translate Hopkins and sheer agony for the one who tackles Joyce, especially *Finnegans Wake*, though the "Anna Livia Plurabella" section of this has been put into Spanish quite cleverly by García Tortosa.

With regards alliteration and rhyme, the former occurs frequently enough in Spanish poetry as does the latter, but Spanish rhyme is predominantly assonantal, like Gaelic verse, and, as Austin Clarke said, "assonance takes the clapper from the bell of rhyme". Now, both alliteration and consonantal rhyme are important in Hopkins' poetry, so a translation which ignored these two elements would lose quite a bit. Of the four translations here in question, that by Pérez Martín is the one which makes the greatest effort to capture both these elements, especially at the beginning of the poem. Here are the first four lines of the original and the different translations:

THOU mastering me God! giver of breath and bread; World's strand, sway of the sea; Lord of living and dead;

Tú, adueñándote de mí Dios! dador de aliento y alimento; Orilla del mundo, vaivén del mar Señor de los vivos y los muertos;

(Pérez Martín)

TU dominándome Dios! Dador del pan y el aliento Orilla del mundo, vaivén del mar; Señor de vivos y muertos

(E. del Río)

Tú me dominas oh Dios, dador del aliento y del pan margen del mundo, vaivén del mar de vivos y muertos Señor;

(Linares Megías)

¡TU maestreando me Dios! Dador de hálito y pan; Mundo-su playa, vaivén del mar; Señor de vivos y muertos;

(Edison Simons)

While the original has two "m" sounds in the first line and two "g" and two "b" sounds in the second as well as the rhyme ABAB, the translation by Pérez Martín has two "t" sounds in the first line: "Tú adueñándote" as well as two "ds"—"adueñándote". The two "d" sounds are carried forward into the second line and are accompanied by two, also initial, "a" sounds: "Dios! dador" and "aliento y alimento". This last minimal pair is also a full consonantal rhyme, which has a pleasing effect as it neatly captures the minimal pair and near rhyme of the original "breath...bread". There is also an assonontal rhyme in her translation—"alimento / muertos" Emilio del Rio also makes good use of alliteration with his "d" sounds: "dominándome/Dios! Dador", as he does of assonantal rhyme: "aliento / muertos". As we can see the other two use less alliteration and rhyme.

And one of them, Edison Simons, makes use of unusual words and constructions: "maestreando" to translate "mastering", when "mastrear" really means to "direct" or "manage". The other three translate this more correctly by "dominar" or "adueñar". He also uses "hálito", instead of the more usual "aliento", to translate "breath", "playa", instead of "orilla" or "margen" for "strand", and the extremely idiosyncratic, and ungrammatical, construction of *a hyphen followd by su* to translate the Saxon Genitive: "Mundo-su" for "World's". In using this construction he is probably taking into account that the apostrophe "S" ('s), of the so-called Saxon Genitive originated in Early Modern English, as Paul Roberts in his book, *Understanding Grammar*, points out from the mistaken belief that the "S" was part of the possessive adjective, "his", with the "hi" omitted and, by anamoly with the abbreviations used for the contracted forms of verbs, an apostrophe was put in before the "S" (6). But the construction with the possessive adjective had never really been used with a noun to indicate possession in English, and much less so in Spanish.

If we now look at the famous fourth stanza, we can see several differences between the four translations. Here are the original and the four translated stanzas:

I am soft sift
In an hourglass – at the wall
Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,
And it crowds and it combs to the fall;
I steady as water in a well, to a poise, to a pane
But roped with, always, all the way down from the tall
Fells or flanks of the voel, a vein
Of the gospel proffer, a pressure, a principle, Christ's gift

(1) (2)

Soy blando cerner
En reloj de arena – a la pared
Ligado, pero minado por una
moción, un arrastre
Que se agolpa y se encrespa en la caída.
Firme soy como agua en el pozo, tensa a un nivel
Pero reforzado siempre hasta lo hondo
desde los altos
Escarpes o flancos de la montaña, agua viva
Que ofrece del Evangelio, presión un principio, don de Cristo

(Pérez Martín)

Yo soy la blanda arena de un reloj de cristal, sujeto al muro, pero lábil en su descenso sosegado que se amontona y se peina al caer. Y yo quieto como el agua de un pozo reposada como hoja de cristal, alimentada siempre con el alto venero que orilla la montaña, con la vena de la Buena Palabra, de la fuente viva, principio, don de Cristo.

(Linares Megías)

⁽⁶⁾ ROBERTS, Paul, Understanding Grammar, Harper & Row, 1954, p. 44.

(3)

Soy el suave cerner
En un reloj de arena, en el muro,
Fijo, pero minado en su moverse, inmóvil
Que se apiña y se peina al caer;
Me quedo como el agua en un pozo, cristal
y equilibrio,
Pero siempre unido hacia abajo desde las altas
Laderas del monte, una vena
De la oferta evangélica, una presión un
principio y don de Cristo.

(E. del Río)

(4)

Soy suave tamiz
En un reloj de arena – en la pared
Fijado, pero minado de una moción,
una deriva,
Y se apiña y se peina a la caída;
Yo estable como un agua en un pozo,
a una pose, a un paño,
Pero liado con, siempre, todo el
camino abajo de los altos
Desmontes o flancos de voel, una vena
Del evangelio proferta, una presura,
un principio, Cristo-su don.

(Edison Simons)

Simply on the linguistic level, there are many things that can be singled out in this famous stanza: one of them is the remarkable use of grammatical conversion. There are at least four or five outstanding cases of conversion here: "sift" in the first line is an example of **verb-noun** conversion; "steady" in the fifth line is **adjective-verb** conversion; in the same line we have the verb "poise" being changed by virtue of **verb-noun** conversion into a *countable* noun, and "proffer" in the last line, which Seamus Heaney considers shows Hopkins' "incredible precision ... with its suggestion of urgency and obligation to accept" and "so much more alive than 'offer'" (7), is another example of **verb-noun** conversion. Besides, "proffer" is preceded by a **noun-adjective** conversion in the use of "gospel", which qualifies the following word. In fact, many of the words used as verbs or participles here: "mined", "crowds", "combs", "roped", would be considered primarily nouns, but because of the typical "-s" and "-ed" verb endings they don't strike us as conversions. Another thing that stands out in this stanza is the use of of the Welsh dialect word "voel" for "hill"

As I mentioned above, **noun-verb** conversion exists in Spanish in a limited sense but not **adjective-verb**, or **noun-adjective** conversion. Now, in two of the four translations, "sift" is translated by a verb, "cerner", meaning "to sift", but, used as a noun, this word could only be construed as the act of sifting, not the result of something sifted. Another translator uses the noun "arena", meaning "sand", while the fourth, uses the word "tamiz", meaning the "sieve", the object used for sifting. The conversion of the adjective "steady" into a kind of reflexive verb = "steady myself", has no parallel in any of the four translations; in the first, the predicative adjective "Firme" is used, inverted with the verb "soy"; in

⁽⁷⁾ HEANEY, idem, p. 89.

the second, the translator uses the adjective "quieto", preceded by the pronoun "yo" and with the verb omitted: the fourth translator does something similar, using the adjective "estable", and then he goes on to convert "agua" into a countable noun, "un agua". Only the third translator uses a verb, "Me quedo" = "I am" or "I remain". "Poise", the verb converted into a noun, is translated in different ways by the four translators; by the adjectives "tensa" y "reposada", in translations one and two,by the noun "equilibrio" = "balance" or "equilibrium", in translation number three and in the case of translation number four, by the noun borrowing from English, "pose", meaning "a pose". The same translator uses the word "paño" to translate "pane", when "paño" strictly speaking means "a piece of cloth", or "a mist or vapour that gathers on glass".

Translator number four is the only one who doesn't translate the word "voel" by "montaña" or "monte"; he unblushingly borrows the original word without italicizing it or putting it in quotation marks or glossing it. If the word is strange in the original but understandable because of Hopkins' acquaintance with Wales and Welsh, its use is completely incomprehensible in translation.

Finally, the double use of conversion in the last line – "gospel proffer" – is translated in different ways: Number one gives us "Que ofrece del Evangelio ..."; number two doesn't translate "proffer" but translates "gospel" by "la Buena Palabra"; number three has "la oferta evangélica". Again, it is number four who stands out with the construction: "evangelio proferta". Now, "proferta" isn't a bad choice, as it means "that which is offered", but the use of a noun as an adjective, "evangelio" to qualify "proferta", is something unheard of in Spanish. In the same line, the same translator uses other debatable constructions and word choices: instead of "presión", used by two of the other translators to translate "pressure", he uses "presura", which means "oppression" or "distress", and the last phrase, "Christ's gift", which all the others translate by "don de Cristo", is translated by him as "Cristo-su don". Again, we have the use of the *hyphen followed by "su"* to translate the Saxon Genitive.

There are a few more things that can be pointed out in the translations of this stanza. None of the translators has made a pretence of respecting the rhyme scheme of the original, which would in any case have been an impossibility, nor of using any coherent form of rhyming. More or less the same can be said of the use of alliteration, especially same-line alliteration. It is translator number four who comes nearest to achieving this with his "pozo", "pose", "paño" in line four and his "proferta", "presura", "principio" in the last line. But, as we have seen, this is unfairly achieved since many of these words don't correctly translate the original text.

With regards the translation of meaning, which is so important, it is translator number one who comes out best, in this stanza and in the rest of the poem.

We have only to look at one or two examples: The first four lines of the original are: "I am soft sift/ In an hourglass – at the wall /Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift,/ And it crowds and it combs to the fall;". Translator number one perceives correctly the image of the sand sticking to the walls of the hourglass but rushing down the necklet, making furrows in the slopes of the sand as it does so. She does this principally by the expressions "a la *pared* /Ligado" and "se *encres-pa*", this latter meaning "to cause furrows or ripples".

Two of the other translators instead of "pared" use "muro", which is an outer wall or containing wall. In fact, translator number two gives an image of a glass clock hanging on a wall: "un reloj de cristal, sujeto al muro". Translators two, three and four translate "combs" by "se peina", which really means "combs its hair", a totally inappropriate image for ripples formed in sand.

This is a brief examination, I know, but I wished to concentrate on a few aspects of the work in question, for much has been written about Hopkins and much more has been written about translations. Any critical work is "slanted" to comply with the writer's stated thesis or his/her confirmed opinions. This is no less so, but, as I said at the outset, I still think the Pérez Martín translation superior to the other three, whatever its limits. Remember, it is the first translation of The Wreck ... into Spanish, antedating the earliest of the others by at least three years. (And, a first translation is always the most risky, leaving the translator exposed to critical flak). The other translators *could* have had access to it; only one of them, Emilio del Río admits to having read it, which is honest of him, but his translation while obviously influenced by it is not slavishly so. The translation by manuel Linares Megías is a gentle, middle-of-the-road affair, faithful to the original, in places, but incapable of making anyone run panting to read the original after having read his version. As for the Edison Simons job, if the Spanish of his version is indebted to anyone it is to Hopkins himself, since the language and constructions he uses belong to a limbo neither properly Spanish nor English. Emilio del Río comments this in his "Prólogo":

"Hay todo un talante de poeta del lenguaje en Simons, que no nos adentra en el tremendo Hopkins del fondo – del que salen las chispas y llamaradas de su lengua única" (8).

Simply, to finish, we can say that it is not the translator's job to be "poetical" or "original" but to be "faithful". If he/she can be and at the same time be imaginative and daring, so much the better, for if there's one thing translations (and Hopkins' commentaries?) doesn't lack it is unimaginative drudges.

⁽⁸⁾ Del RIO, Emilio, *El Naufragio del Deutschland y otros poemas*, Adonais, Ediciones Rialp, Madrid, (1984), "Prólogo", p. 17.

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