FROM *SEBELL* AND *THE GRUNYE* TO *SEVILLA* AND *LA CORUÑA*: TRANSLATING BARBOUR'S *BRUCE* INTO SPANISH

Much work remains to be done in the field of translating mediaeval English texts into Spanish. My own interest in the history of Scots and my activity in the area of translation eventually led me to the project of producing a Spanish version of Scotland's major epic poem. This article aims to set out some of the reasons for carrying out such a translation and to make some considerations about the technical problems involved. Some of the ideas included here were presented in a paper delivered at the Fifth Symposium on Literary Translation held at the University of Extremadura at Cáceres in May 1991, and others in a paper delivered at the Third Cardiff Conference on the Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages, held at the University of Wales in August 1991. In October 1991 this translation project was awarded a grant from the Spanish Ministry of Culture (Ayudas a la Creación Literaria, modalidad de Traducción). I wish to acknowledge the help received, which will mean that the translation will be ready for publication in 1993.

John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen, started to write the epic poem *The Bruce*, based on the life and exploits of Robert Bruce, King Robert I of Scotland, in 1375, as we are told in the poem, and probably completed it in 1376. The work has come down to us in two manuscripts, both of them copied out in the fifteenth century. The Cambridge MS (C) was written out in 1487, by a copyist identified as

John Ramsay. The Edinburgh MS (E) was written out in 1489 by the same copyist, although recent studies show that it was probably copied from an older text. For editorial purposes, and ever since Pinkerton's edition of E in 1790, the work has been divided into twenty Books, although no such division exists in the manuscripts. Walter W. Skeat edited C for the Early English Text Society in 1870-89. Up to Book IV, line 57, he followed E, since that first part, an estimated 25 pages, is missing in the Cambridge MS. M.P. McDiarmid and J.A.C. Stevenson (Editor of the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*) edited E in 1980-85: according to Stevenson's studies, it is a "better" text than C, and reflects an earlier stage of the language. The poem is written in Early Scots, a variety which has many features in common with the dialect known as Northern Middle English and also some peculiarly Scottish characteristics. Early Scots is dated from 1375 (to 1450) precisely because that is the date of composition of *The Bruce*, the first major work of Scottish literature.

Up to now, this epic poem has never been translated into Spanish, but I think there are several good motives for doing so. The most obvious one is given by Barbour in the very first line of the poem: "Storys to rede ar delitabill." Ideally, all major works of literature should be made available to the greatest number of readers possible, and that in itself is a good enough reason for translating. But perhaps one should ask more precisely what a work like *The Bruce* can offer a reader of present-day Spanish. Like the epic poem it is, more in the style of the *chansons de geste* than in that of romances of chivalry, it offers the narration of brave exploits by the two main heroes, Bruce and Douglas, and the struggle of the Scottish people in their fight to break away from the subjection to which they had been submitted by King Edward I of England. It presents a lively narration of several battles and skirmishes, and especially of the Battle of Bannockburn,

and includes a famous passage in praise of freedom, among many other brilliant moments. Spanish readers will find several points of contact with the most famous of Spanish epic poems, the *Cantar de Mio Cid* (1140), which recounts the feats of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, "El Cid," in fighting against the Moors who had invaded Spain. Like *El Cid, The Bruce* is based on historical facts, but the author's aim is not so much to write a chronicle as to praise the virtues of the heroes of the story, and to express the idea of national freedom. Nevertheless, *The Bruce* is one of the main sources of information about the Anglo-Scottish wars in the fourteenth century. A Spanish audience will now have a chance to read about the wars between England and Scotland as they were told by a Scotsman of the time. It could also be argued that, with nationalism still an important issue in present-day Europe, a reading of *The Bruce* can be of help in obtaining a historical perspective.

For Spanish readers there is an added interest in the final part of the poem, in Book XX, where we find a description of Lord James Douglas's death in Spain. After King Robert I died, we are told in the poem, Douglas tried to keep the promise he had made to his sovereign, which was to carry the King's heart in a silver case on a crusade to the Holy Land. Douglas and his men travel to Spain on their way there. They sail past "the grunye of spanye" (La Coruña, in Spain) till they come to "sebell the graunt" (Seville the great). There Douglas decides to help the King of Spain fight against the Sarracens, and is eventually killed in a skirmish against them. Historians in Spain have tried to reconstruct the facts behind this episode,[1] and now the Spanish public will be able to read it as told in the poem.

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[1].- See J. E. López de Coca and B. Krauel, "Cruzados escoceses en la frontera de Granada (1330)", in *Anuario de estudios medievales*, no. 18 (Barcelona: C.S.I.C., 1988), 245-261. See also Blanca Krauel Heredia, "Sir James Douglas's Death in Spain, 1330" in *The Scottish Historical Review*, vol. LXIX, no. 187 (1990), 84-95.

These reasons seem to justify the attempt to translate the full poem into present-day Spanish. Once that has been accepted as the translator's aim, several methodological questions arise. In the first place, a decision has to be made about the text to be used as a basis for the translation. The authoritative editions of the two manuscripts, by Skeat (C) and McDiarmid and Stevenson (E), make it feasible for the translator to work on them without having to translate from the originals, although one should always count on the fact that the need to go back to the manuscripts may come up in some particular instances. In the light of the reasons given by Stevenson in his introduction to the edition of E, the translator's choice must be to use that edition of the Edinburgh MS as the basis. However, in my opinion, Skeat's edition of the Cambridge MS should always be kept at hand, and his glossary and many of his notes and observations will prove to be be most valuable aids to translation. Skeat's punctuation of the poem is certainly a help: Whereas Stevenson keeps punctuation to a minimum, trying to edit the text as close to the original as possible, Skeat punctuated his text much more profusely. In my opinion, there is little point in trying to reflect the original lack of punctuation in the translation, and therefore Skeat's suggested punctuation (with which, however, I do not agree in all instances), is a major guideline.

Differences between the MSS as far as contents are concerned should be pointed out in notes, indicating the lines which are present or absent in C as compared with E, and including the translation of those lines as notes. Textual differences such as variant spellings, or the use of different words which amount to much the same meaning need not of course be noted, since these do not normally affect the translation. There are, of course, cases in which such items are important. A good example of this, which also illustrates why McDiarmid and Stevenson's edition of E is to be preferred, can be seen in the reference to La Coruña quoted above. In Book XX, lines 324-5, when

Douglas's trip to Spain is described, Skeat's text has : "He salit, and left the grund of Spanye / On north half him…," where Skeat takes *grund* as "ground." Stevenson points out that both E and C have *grunye* but that Skeat, not recognizing the place-name, emended to *grund.*[1] The translation must, of course, reflect Stevenson's and not Skeat's reading.

Once the source text has been selected, two decisions regarding language and form must be made. One has to do with the type of Spanish to be used; the other means making a choice between a prose or a verse translation. The first question poses the problem of whether one should try to use something resembling fourteenth-century Spanish when translating a fourteenth-century text. In this aspect the translator may find help in the advice offered by a master of things mediaeval, Sir Walter Scott. In the Dedicatory Epistle to *Ivanhoe*, Laurence Templeton, the "author" of the work, explains that in narrating manners and events of times past it is not a good idea to try to use only those words and phrases which have fallen out of use. He says that in fact the words and expressions which have remained the same in the language from the older days to our time are much greater in number than those which have become obsolete since then. He also suggests that anyone wishing to imitate what they admire in earlier times should try to avoid the error of Chatterton, the eighteenth-century poet, who, in order to give his language the appearance of antiquity, "rejected every word that was modern, and produced a dialect entirely different from any that had ever been spoken in Great Britain." In other words, we can accept as advice for the translator of medieval texts what Scott was suggesting for the writer of historical novels:

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[1].- López de Coca and Krauel (op. cit.) also say the place referred to is La Coruña.

> His language must not be exclusively obsolete and unintelligible; but he should admit, if possible, no word or turn of phraseology betraying an origin directly modern.[1]

Thus, in translating into Spanish, it would not be wise to rely solely on an archaic vocabulary. In my opinion, one should definitely avoid employing certain characteristics of Old Spanish which may look as if they would give the text an ancient appearance. These would be things such as the use of *e* as the coordinating conjunction (the older form as opposed to present-day *y*), or putting the definite article before a possessive adjective preceding a noun ("la mi espada") which would give a sort of "mock Old Spanish flavour" to the text. A careful look at dates in the Spanish Etymological Dictionary[2] in many cases will show the translator that the Spanish equivalent that comes to mind for a term was probably already in use in the fourteenth century anyway, but the main aid to be got from such a work is information about recent usage of words and expressions. The translator should certainly strive to avoid idioms which sound very new, or those which have developed a different meaning in modern times.

As far as geographical dialect is concerned, the fact that the text is in Early Scots does not imply a stylistic problem for the translation, since the whole poem is written in that dialect, and there are no contrasts with other varieties. A translation of Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale* would be harder in this sense, since the translator would wish to reflect the students' Northern dialect as contrasted with the East Midland one used in the narrative and in the miller's speech. For *The*

1.- Walter Scott, Dedicatory Epistle to *Ivanhoe* (1819) (London: Dent, 1977). the quotations are from pp. 19 and 20.

2.- Joan Corominas annd José Antonio Pascual, *Diccionario Crítico Etimológico Castellano e Hispánico* (6 vols. Madrid: Gredos, 1980-1991).

Bruce the translator of course has to be familiar with the grammar and vocabulary of Early Scots (which differs from Chaucer's East Midland dialect in several ways), but once a decision has been made about the dialect of Spanish into which the text will be translated, no other varieties have to be sought. I am translating *The Bruce* into Standard Spanish (Castilian), which seems the obvious choice since it is the type of Spanish in which most books are written, but other dialects could also be used if they were used consistently. In keeping with Scott's recommendations, I feel it is adequate in some cases to make a sparing use of archaic words that would fit in well with the tone of the text. I would like to quote as an example of a similar attitude the words of Dr. Luis Cortés Vázquez in the Introduction to his translation into Spanish of *La Chanson de Roland*:

> Como observarán mis lectores he usado a veces, sin exagerar, un léxico arcaizante; palabras como *aviltar, guarir, huesa, fortuna*, en lugar de las hoy usuales de *envilecer, proteger, bota de montar* o *tempestad*, que espero sirvan para dar una adecuada ambientación al texto.[1]

In this line, the vocabulary used in the *Cantar de Mio Cid* is often a good source. An obvious example is the word *mesnada* "a company of men at arms who in old times served under the command of the king or of a rich man or leading knight" (to translate the definition given in the *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua Española*), a word which is certainly archaic today, but which is the best translation for *menye* in *The Bruce*, glossed by Stevenson as "a band

[1].- Luis Cortés Vázquez, *El cantar de Roldán* (Salamanca, 1975). His translation of the Oxford MS of the *Chanson* is in verse, the *laisses* being rendered in Spanish *alejandrinos* with the same rhyme (*rima asonante)* being kept throughout each *lais*, as in the original.

of followers, army," a word not to be found in present-day English (or present-day Scots, at least not in that sense). Both words ultimately go back to the same Latin source, Scots having taken the word from Old French, and *mesnada* certainly appears as the most adequate equivalent. The same could be said for the word *battail* in the sense of "division (of an army)." The *Diccionario* quoted above includes that definition as one of the senses of Spanish *batalla*, but the word has fallen out of use in that sense, though it was frequent in Old Spanish. Terms of this type are perhaps the easiest and safest way of reflecting the antiquity of the text without forcing the language into a parody of its older stages. Apart from the *Cantar de Mio Cid*, the Spanish *romances*, metrical narratives based -sometimes rather loosely- on historical events and figures, and written especially in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Spain, are good sources for vocabulary that may be suitable to the period of the text. I would like to add that the considerations just given apply mostly to the idea of a prose translation; in the case of a verse translation (and Dr. Cortés did an excellent one, with rhyme), I feel that the translator should be allowed the poetic licence of making a slightly broader use of such archaisms, and even resorting more frequently to some constructions, such as the use of the verb *ser* with intransitive verbs of motion, as opposed to modern usage which favours *haber* ("es llegado" *vs.* "ha llegado"). Which brings up the other major question: prose or verse?

The question of whether to translate the text as prose or verse must be faced taking several things into account. As a translator, I tend to agree more and more with the idea that poetry must be translated as poetry, and thus if the original text conforms to certain patterns of metre or rhyme, the translation should also be bound by certain formal requisites, though not necessarily the same patterns. The next thing to add is that not all poetry is, so to say, "poetic" in the same degree, and that metre and rhyme do not of themselves make a

text "poetic." As an example of this, I will quote the translation into present-day English of some lines from *The Bruce*. As someone familiar with the poem who has attempted verse translations of several parts of it, I am aware that it is extremely difficult to keep up a rhyme-scheme, couplets in this case, throughout the translation of a poem over 13,600 lines long. My point is that keeping to the requirements of rhyme and metre does not always make for "poetry." We may find that powerful lines like Barbour's reproach to the Scots for having allowed King Edward I of England to decide who should be King of Scotland (Book I, lines 91-94):

> A! blynd folk full off all foly!
> Haid ye wmbethocht yow enkrely
> Qhuat perell to yow mycht apper,
> Ye had nocht wrocht on that maner.

may lose the greater part of their force due to the changes required by keeping to rhyme and metre:

> Ah, foolish folk, how blind ye were
> For had ye thought with greater care
> What perils to you soon might grow,
> Ye would not have arranged it so.[1]

Also, metre and rhyme may be much more relevant stylistically in shorter lyrical compositions than in lengthy historical narratives like *The Bruce.* If in spite of this the translator decides to attempt a translation in verse,the next thing would be to decide what type of line to use. *The Bruce* is written in tetrameters, which in a strict correspondence would give us the Spanish *octosílabo*, or eight-syllable line, but

[1].- As in the translation into modern English by Archibald H. Douglas (London: McClellan, 1964).

it is a fact that, English being a language which has many native monosyllabic words, and Spanish having a greater number of polysyllabic words, a line translated *fully* into Spanish may have nearly twice the length of the original (and the reverse is also true). The lines which at first thought might suggest themselves as most suitable for the type of poetry involved might seem to be the fourteen-syllable Spanish *alejandrino*, the line most frequently used in *El Cantar de Mio Cid*, or the eight-syllable line used in the *romances*. However, the former turns out to be too long in most cases, while the latter is far too short if a fairly high degree of literalness is desired.[1]

If we decided on a verse translation having a fixed metre (which will always mean a certain loss in the literalness of the translation), the line that would seem to suit the translation best would probably be the *endecasílabo*, or eleven-syllable line, which in length is the close equivalent of the English pentameter (a line which, in turn, is usually best rendered as the Spanish *alejandrino*, or fourteen-syllable line). Using the eleven-syllable line, if rhyme were to be employed, we would then have have to decide on a rhyme-scheme. Couplets of course are the closest to the original, but other possibilities are available, including the rhyme-scheme of the *romances*, where the even-number lines rhyme with the type of rhyme known as *rima asonante* (only the vowels from the last stress onward of the words in rhyme position have to be the same). I have used eleven-syllable rhyming couplets in translating the lines in praise of freedom found in Book I, and eleven-syllable lines with the second rhyme-scheme described in

[1].- A most interesting discussion on the relationship between the metre and rhyme-scheme chosen and the amount of literalness conveyed in the translation of poetry was presented by Tomás Ramos Orea in his paper "La traducción de poesía o el juego de los espejos" delivered at the Quinto Simposio sobre Traducción Literaria (Inglés > Castellano, Catalán, Gallego y Vasco) at the University of Extremadura at Cáceres in May 1991. He exemplified with his own translations of the same poem (part of Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress") rendered into Spanish in four different poetic patterns.

translating part of Bruce's address to his men before the battle of Bannockburn in Book XII. Some examples from both are given at the end.

As for the question of the tone and "ancient flavour" of the translation, the Spanish vocabulary used here would go to prove Scott's point: practically all the words in those lines already existed in fourteenth-century Spanish, and they are all still in use today. It would be desirable to have a full verse translation following one of these patterns, but the task would take a long time, and the effort might not be worth it: there would inevitably be passages which, although they might formally maintain the rhyme and metre, would in fact not be very "poetic" at all (as in the case of the modern English version quoted earlier; in fact,something similar happens in the original at certain points), and yet their meaning would have been altered, however little, by the demands of conforming to rhyme and metre.

At present, my position as a translator of *The Bruce* is that it seems more convenient to start off by producing a full prose translation of the text. As explained above, in the case of long narrative poems like *The Bruce* the formal poetic shape is not as important as in other types of poetry. Keeping in mind Scott's advice as outlined and Ilustrated above, I believe that an acceptable prose translation which is faithful to the contents and to the tone and style of the poem is a reasonable aim. Barbour's opening lines, of which I have already quoted the first, say:

> Storys to rede ar delitabill,
> Suppos that thai be nocht but fabill;
> Than suld storyss that suthfast wer,
> And thai wer said on gud maner,
> Hawe doubill plesance in heryng.
> The fyrst plesance is the carpyng,

And the tothir the suthfastnes,
That schawys the thing rycht as it wes …

The translator should try to make *the carpyng* (i.e. the narrating) a credible echo of the original; although there is some literary loss in doing a prose translation, I believe it is possible to produce one which can give the reader of modern Spanish a degree of *plesance* comparable to that obtained by a reader of the Early Scots original. My project as it stands is to complete the prose translation and to include as an appendix the verse translations of several major passages, such as the praise of freedom, some of Bruce's addresses to his men, episodes from the Battle of Bannockburn, and some from Douglas's expedition and death in Spain. It is my wish that the *doubill plesance* will not be greatly diminished: a faithful and well documented translation will ensure that the *suthfastnes* put into the poem by Barbour will not be altered; the care put into the prose translation and the craft put into the excerpts translated as verse will, I hope, make the *carpyng* at least half as pleasant as that of the original.

SAMPLES OF VERSE TRANSLATION

(The originals here are as edited by Skeat)

Lines in praise of freedom (Book I, lines 225-242).

A! fredome is A noble thing!
Fredome mayss man to haiff liking;
Fredome all solace to mann giffis:
He levys at ess that frely levys!

A noble hart may haiff nane ess,
Na ellys nocht that may him pless,
Giff fredome failyhe, for fre liking
Is yharnit our all othir thing.
Na, he that ay hass levyt fre,
may nocht knaw weill the propyrte,
The angyr, na the wrechyt dome,
That is couplyt to foul thyrldome.
Bot giff he had assyit It,
Than all perquher he suld It wit;
And suld think fredome more to pryss
Than all the gold in warld that Is
Thus contrar thingis euir-mar,
Discoweringis off the tothir ar.

¡La libertad es una cosa noble!
La libertad le da albedrío al hombre,
la libertad todo solaz confiere:
¡vive con paz quien vive libremente!
Para un corazón noble no hay sosiego,
ni cosa que le agrade por entero,
si falta libertad, que el libre arbitrio
para él será el bien más perseguido.
No, quien haya vivido siempre libre,
no sabrá bien qué condición tan triste,
qué ira y qué miseria encierra el sino
que el vil sometimiento trae consigo.
Mas si hubiere vivido sojuzgado,
entonces lo sabrá, con saber largo;
tendrá la libertad por más preciada

que todo el oro que en el mundo haya.
Pues siempre, de este modo, los opuestos
uno del otro son descubrimientos.

Bruce encourages his men (book XII, 231-258). For reasons of space only two of the three "advantges" are given here.

"And, certis, me think weill that we,
far-out abasyng, aucht til be
Worthy and of gret wassalage
For we haue thre gret avantage.
The first is, that we haue the richt;
And for the richt ilk man suld ficht.
The tothir is, thai ar cummyn heir,
For lypning in thar gret power,
To seik vs in our awne land,
And [has] brocht her, richt til our hand,
Riches in-to so gret plentee,
That the pourest of yow sal be
Bath rych and mychty thar-with-all,
Gif that we wyn, as weill may fall."

Y a mí sin duda me parece bueno
que luchemos con brío y con fiereza,
pues nosotros tenemos tres ventajas.
Tenemos la razón, es la primera;
por la razón han de luchar los hombres.
Es la segunda, que hasta nuestra tierra,

a buscarnos aquí han venido ellos,
muy confiados en sus grandes fuerzas,
y así han traído hasta nuestras manos
tan grandes cantidades de riquezas
que harán que sea el más pobre de vosotros
muy rico y poderoso gracias a ellas,
si, como bien pudiera ser, vencemos.[1]

EDITIONS OF *THE BRUCE*

McDIARMID, J.A.P. & STEVENSON, J.A.C.,1980-85: *Barbour's Bruce.* Edinburgh: The Scottish Text Society (3 vols.)

SKEAT, W. W., 1870-89: *Barbour's Bruce*. The Early English Text Society. E.E.T.S. facsimile: O.U.P.,1968 (2 vols.)

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[1].- Spanish readers may find it interesting to compare Bruce's second *avantage* -"in coming to conquer us the English are really bringing riches to your hands"- with El Cid's words to Doña Jimena who is frightened at seeing the Moors gather around Valencia: *"Ya mugier ondrada, non ayades pesar! / Riqueza es que nos acreçe, maravillosa e grand: / a poco que viniestes, presend vos quieren dar: / por casar son vuestra fijas, adúzenvos axuvar."* (lines 1647-1650, as edited by R. Menéndez Pidal).