

INCENDIARIO BY VERNON SCANNELL: AN IMAGINARY EXAMPLE OF A FUNCTIONAL ANNOTATED VERSE TRANSLATION***Incendiario* de Vernon Scannell: un ejemplo imaginario de una traducción en verso funcional y anotada****Juan Miguel ZARANDONA***Universidad de Valladolid***TRANSLATION BRIEF**

The National Library of Poetry, 1 Poetry Plaza, Owings Mills, Maryland 21117-6282, is the largest and most active poetry society in the world, with members all over America and in over 60 other countries. Regularly, its Board of Directors and Advisory Committee organize multiawarded *Poetry Contests* open to all deserving poets, whether published or not, and regardless of experience, *Poetic Events* consisting of different poetic seminars, workshops and readings, and *International Conventions and Symposiums* on poetry. They also publish, on a regular basis, *The Poet's Corner*, a colourful, 40-page quarterly magazine, and different *Anthologies*, which have proved to be very popular among new poets.

The National Library of Poetry has recently published many such Anthologies, which are open -free of charge- to all outstanding creative contributions and that boast of showcasing today's most talented poets and songwriters, to whom they have become a sort of guide to be used by editors and publishers in the search for aspiring poets. Recent general book titles are: *A Quiet Place*, *Flights of Imagination*, *Last Good-Byes*, *The Fullness of Time*, and *The Colors of the Wind*.

So far, they have only published original poems, and neglected «translated poetry». But this is a situation that is going to change. They have finally realized the key role played by translated poetry, and literary translation in general, in the history of human cultural events, and the paramount difficulties this kind of highly artistic activities involves.

Consequently, they have advertised their project the world over, and explained that they will publish two different anthologies devoted to translated poetry during the year 2001. The first one, specializing in poetry from any world language into English, and the second, entitled *Feelings that Travel Far*, from English to any world language.

Last week, a translation of the poem «Incendiary» (1962) by the British artist Vernon Scannell (1922-) was submitted to The National Library of Poetry headquarters in Maryland: «Incendiario» (2000) by the Spanish poet and freelance literary translator Carlos Joaquín Peña.

A letter notifying Mr Peña that his translated poem was selected for publication, and as a possible new translated poetry contest semifinalist, on the basis of his unique talent was delivered two days later.

INITIATOR OF THE TRANSLATION: The National Library of Poetry.

SOURCE TEXT READERS: English speaking lovers of the poetry of Vernon Scannell.

PROJECTED TARGET READER: Spanish speaking lovers or would-be lovers of the poetry of Vernon Scannell.

INTENDED FUNCTION OF THE TRANSLATION: Promotion of poetry in general, and of translated poetry in particular. Expressive function (individual feelings and emotions); appellative function (appealing to the reader's aesthetic sensitivity by means of poetic language).

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Vernon Scannell, the Man and the Poet

I discovered the poems by Scannell in 1993, when he published his *Collected Poems. 1950-1993*. I discovered that there was a man of sensibility and talent who has spent his life writing poetry and of whom I did not know anything, but that book changed my literary life.

Now I know his poetry book titles by heart: *Graves and Resurrections* (1948), *A Mortal Pitch* (1957), *The Masks of Love* (1960), *A Sense of Danger* (1962), *Walking Wounded* (1965), *Epithets of War* (1965), *The Winter Man* (1973), *The Loving Game* (1975), *Winterlude* (1982), *Funeral Games* (1987), *Soldiering On* (1989), *A Time for Fire* (1971), etc.

Now I know that Vernon Scannell was born in 1922 in Spilsby (Lincolnshire), the land of another great poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and studied at Leeds University, that his unconventional career has embraced army service, boxing, teaching and freelance writing and broadcasting. He has also been awarded many tokens of public recognition: *The Heinemann Award for Literature*, *The Cholmondeley Poetry Award*, *Society of Authors Travelling Scholarship*, *Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature*, and *Civil List Pension for Services to Literature*.

However, now I know that it is surprising for many that he is not more widely recognized, that, although his work has won the admiration of readers and critics throughout the English-speaking world, he has not earned the universal recognition he deserves as one of the major talents of his generation. Translators are probably much to blame for this.

Scannell is also a member of a vanishing breed of artists, a poet of technical accomplishments who understands that poetry, like other arts, is a craft as well. His books are full of the forms, stanzas, verses, metres, rhymes and rhythms of the best tradition of English poetry. In the *Introductory Notes* to his *Collected Poems. 1950-1993* he wrote:

At a time when much contemporary poetry seems to be written for specialist exegesists in the universities in order that they may practise their own skills in deconstruction I have, as **Wordsworth** said, ‘wished to keep the reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by doing so I shall interest him’.

In this 1993 introduction he also mentions a second nineteenth-century poet, probably his second master and beloved model poet:

... not less seriousness of purpose in the sense that **Gerard Manley Hopkins** used the word ‘seriousness’ when he explained that he did not mean gravity but the being in earnest with your subject-reality

‘A man is also those whom he admires’. ‘Present poetry always benefits from past poetry’. Vernon Scannell proves both claims right. And «Incendiary» benefits from this greatly.

Incendiary

Scannell is a very careful poet regarding what he publishes and what he does not. He loves his work too much to take any risks. In the *Introductory Notes to New and Collected Poems* (1980) he wrote:

Well here I suppose is my life, or the part of it by which I would wish to be judged. In this book I have included all of the pieces that I believe to be, irrespective of their literary quality, genuine poems, that is to say poems which have been written from a sense of compulsion, a real need to explore and articulate experiences that have been important to me.

«Incendiary», published in *A Sense of Danger* in 1962, is one chosen by the translator, and a favourite of mine, for the The International Society of Poetry anthology of translated poetry *Feelings that Travel Far*.

The poem was written in the most important metre in English letters, ‘blank verse’, the one in which most of its greater poetry has been written. It is unrhymed and consists of five iambic feet: v/ v/ v/ v/ v/, and usually occupies the time taken by a breath, making it suitable for dramatic performance. The Earl of Surrey (?1517-1547) was the first poet who used it in English for his translation of the *Aeneid* by Virgil as the best equivalent for the Latin heroic line, the hexameter.

Although the five stress pattern is almost a must, it also has the advantage of considerable variety in rhythm, which permits the identification of many varieties within the metre. Three of these may be held to predominate: the ‘Miltonic blank verse’, with its heavy stresses and slow rhythm; ‘the Shakespearian blank verse’, with its dramatic contrasts and near-breakage in rhythm; and the ‘Wordsworthian blank verse’, notably quiet in tone with its preference for medium stress.

‘Blank verse’ can sound very different from one poet to another. This may be the reason why this metre has never lost its place as the central medium for English poetry. Scannell, a twentieth-century poet, still proves it by means of poems such as «Incendiary». His blank verse probably

follows the rules of Wordsworth, more or less, but it is crystal clear that he has made such versatile form sound just the way the poet Scannell's inner life sounds.

But «Incendiary» is neither free verse nor a prose poem, it is 'form bound poetry', and, no matter how rewarding or creative it may be, this is always a complex translation challenge. Both the contents and the form must be taken into account by the translator.

Researchers and translation theorists have never hesitated to proclaim their scepticism regarding the possibility of translating metrical poetry, and, when attempted, the unavoidable necessity to master the metrics both of the source and target literary languages to the utmost.

Holmes (1970: 24-45), for example, talks of *metaliterature*, and mentions seven rewriting processes a poem can undergo: criticism in the same language, criticism in a different language, literal or free prose translation, verse translation, direct imitation, partial imitation and remote imitation. Lefevere (in Bassnett 1991: 81-82) writes about seven possible strategies: phonetic, literal, prose, rhymed or blank verse translation (the only one he recommends), and an interpretation where only the contents are kept or a new independent poem in imitation of the original one. Finally Etkin (in Gallego 1994: 133) offers a six-point typology: informative, interpretative, allusive, approximative, recreative and imitative. The second is the only one that involves real translation processes.

We want to translate a blank verse poem, so the encouraging words by Lefevere are very helpful. The sound words by Christine Pagnouille (1992: 139-148) in favour of the translation of poetry are very comfortable as well.

JUAN CARLOS PEÑA

ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

INCENDIARY

That one small boy with a face like pallid cheese
 And burnt-out little eyes could make a blaze
 As brazen, fierce and huge, as red and gold
 And zany yellow as the one that spoiled
 Three thousand guineas' worth of property
 And crops at Godwin's Farm on Saturday
 Is frightening -as fact and metaphor:
 An ordinary match intended for
 The lighting of a pipe or kitchen fire
 Misused may set a whole menagerie

Of flame-fanged tigers roaring hungrily.
 And frightening, too, that one small boy should set
 The sky of fire and choke the stars to heat
 Such skinny limbs and such a little heart
 Which would have been content with one warm kiss
 Had there been anyone to offer this.

INCENDIARIO 1

Que un pequeñín
 de cara de queso pálido 2
 y ojillo apagado pueda
 prender una gran hoguera
 5 y tan descarada, enorme
 y feroz, tan rara, rojiza,
 dorada y amarillenta 3
 como la que destruyó
 esa granja, valorada
 10 en tres miles de guineas 4,
 de los Godwin el sábado,
 da mucho miedo 5 ya sea
 verdad 6 o ya metáfora: 7
 El que una vulgar cerilla 8
 15 para prender el fuego de
 la pipa o de la cocina
 produzca, por su mal uso,
 tal feroz rugido hambriento
 y atigrado de colmillos
 20 flamígeros en su jaula 9.
 Y da también mucho miedo 10,
 que un niño tan pequeñito 11
 pueda prender hasta el cielo
 y ahogar a las estrellas
 25 con el calor del gran fuego 12
 con brazos tan delgadines 13
 y un corazón tan chiquito 14
 que se habrían contentado
 con un beso de cariño
 30 si allí tan sólo ya alguien
 sí se lo hubiera ofrecido 15.

VERNON SCANNELL

(Translated by J.C. Peña)

ENDNOTES

1 First of all, we keep the same title. We think it is a very good one for the original poem and, consequently, the best option for the translation as well. Besides, «incendiary» and «incendiario» display very similar forms and equal contents in both languages.

Secondly, we have chosen an octosyllabic metre to translate the original blank verse. The Spanish *octosílabo* is the most important short metre in the history of Spanish poetry. Not only have great poets made use of it since the early Middle Ages until our present times, but it is the form in which most popular poetry is written, the *romancero*, for example, and the form of the Spanish classical theatre as well. It also usually occupies the time taken by a breath (Quilis 1978 54-55). Consequently, it is a metre that shares many of the features typical of English blank verse. However, there is one difference, the iambic pentameter is longer than the Spanish *octosílabo*, which added to the fact that Spanish words are generally longer than the English ones, results in a much longer 31-line translated poem instead of the 16-line original one. No problem from our point of view.

However, in spite of these logical differences, we believe that translating English blank verse by this type of Spanish blank octosyllabic metre could be considered a clear example of what Nord (1997: 47-52) calls *homologous instrumental translation*, one in which the literary status of the ST within the TT culture corresponds to the literary status of the original.

2 The first line presents a very important figure of speech, a simile: ‘like pallid cheese’, which can be easily associated to the colour white. It is very important not to omit anything related to this because of the paradoxical contrast between the ‘pallid cheese whiteness’ of the beginning and the reds and yellows of the rest of the agitated poem. Actually, the whole poem contents and structure is organized in the rhetoric form of several paradoxes or contradictions: what a weak small boy usually is and does, and what has happened.

3 The description of the fire is based on a very special long accumulation of adjectives which we have reproduced. First, those describing their especially violent nature, and then those related to its hot colours. The repetition of *dorado* (gold) and *amarillo* (yellow) is very emphatic.

We can also think of an example of alliteration among the words **burnt-out**, **blaze** and **brazen**. Alliteration has not much to do with the tradition of Spanish metrics or with the possibilities of this language either. It is *almost* impossible to translate.

4 Formerly in Britain, a guinea was a gold coin worth the sum of 21 shillings (now &1.05). We have kept this name because it is well known among Spanish readers, because we want our translation to sound a bit exotic, because an old Spanish gold coin name would not sound very natural in a poem by a British Vernon Scanell, and, mainly, because we believe that it is not the figure that matters, but the idea of a huge amount of money, which is perfectly preserved in the translation.

5 The phrase «*Da mucho miedo*» translates the original line 7 phrase «*Is frightening*», which is again repeated five lines later. This important poetic cohesion device, small refrain or anaphoric

rhetorical repetition, is very important in the global context of the text. The same words must be reproduced a second time in the translation, as we have done in lines 12 and 21.

What is frightening? Why did such paradoxical terrible goings-on take place? What really happened and why? Readers are not fully told the whole answer until the end of the poem. The poem successfully creates an atmosphere of mystery and suspense, a kind of intriguing riddle. The translator must be aware of this.

6 This distinction between the real world (fact) and literature, i.e., the world of fiction (metaphor), is very interesting, emphatic, involves the two dimensions of human life, tells us a lot about the author, and must, consequently, be translated very carefully.

7 The first part of the poem finishes here. The text presents a very clear structure consisting of three different sections or circles around the same incidents: a) lines 1-7; b) lines 8-11; and c) lines 12-16. Each part reproduces the same story again but giving new information about the child and the fire. It has been noted the shrewd structures of Scannell's superbly integrated poems hold their elements finally in place, and here it appears that we have proof of this assertion. This kind of repetition is very emphatic and communicates a very deep feeling of painful surprise and incredulity. The translation strives to reproduce this sophisticated layout. The new structure is as follows: part 1, lines 1-13; part 2, lines 16-20; and part 3, lines 21-31.

8 This second time, the poem focuses its attention not on the boy but on the small seemingly innocent instrument he made use of, an ordinary match. The poem, next to metaphors and other poetic traditional rhetorical devices and motives, includes some everyday objects without an established tradition in the literary world: cheese, match, pipe, guineas. The register contrasts are sometimes shocking, but we must remember that 'literariness' is first and foremost a pragmatic quality assigned to a particular text or part or element(s) by its users. Intratextual factors are not marked 'literary' or 'non-literary' as such. It is the receivers or readers who decide to read a text as literature (Nord 1997: 82). However, what we cannot deny is that it is very important to reproduce these objects in the translation because it is something the author planned very carefully.

9 This is the most important image -or set of images- that the poem contains: fire, and its violent and noisy capacity of destruction, is described in terms of a wild and frightening menagerie of tigers. It is a great and difficult metaphor that must be translated very carefully as well. In spite of the risky challenge, our translation keeps all the original figurative elements.

10 This line, containing the small refrain again, opens the third and last part of the poem. We are approaching the final message, but we are still told what happened a third time.

11 The boy is the focus of all attention again and the first line phrase «small boy» makes a second appearance in the poem.

12 These appeals to 'sky' and 'stars' elevate the scope of the disaster greatly. The tone is very emotional, hyperbolic and emphatic in its literary exaggeration. New figures of speech the translator must take into account.

13 As the fire and its effects increase, the boy and his anatomy are described as decreasing. The basic underlying paradox again. The conclusion and poem end are close.

14 The octosyllabic verses of our translation are unrhymed, but the original Spanish *octosílabo* present vocalic rhyme every two lines. In Spanish, consequently, the lines ending in the words *chiquito* (line 27), *cariño* (line 29), *ofrecido* (line 31), with the repetition of the i/o vowel combination are rhymed. The translator has not done it on purpose and does not consider it necessary to change it. The general pattern is unrhymed and those examples can just be regarded as isolated cases of no importance. Besides, some occasional rhymes are not necessarily a fault.

15 We finally realize that it is a love poem, a lack of love poem to be more precise. This is the answer to the mystery, the riddle, the paradox and everything else. Do not forget to kiss and love your children. The translator must not omit this message at all. This is the kind of writing that really stops one short, the kind of writing by Vernon Scannell.

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