DENIS FLORENCE MACCARTHY'S TRANSLATIONS OF CALDERÓN DE LA BARCA[1]

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Denis Florence MacCarthy, a nineteenth-century Irish poet, translator and biographer, is perhaps best remembered today by Joycean scholars, owing to the fact that a copy of his *Poem*s is to be found in Leopold Bloom's personal library. Nevertheless, MacCarthy was quite well known in his own time. This paper will argue that although he was not particularly politically active, MacCarthy's translations from seventeenth-century Spanish poet and dramatist Calderón de la Barca provide insight into the nationalistic attitudes of the Irish writer's early patriotic verse. This aspect of MacCarthy's translations will be highlighted by exploring his relation to contemporary admirers of Calderón, such as James Clarence Mangan and Percy Bysshe Shelley. MacCarthy's views on translation will also be explored to these ends.

Born on Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street), Dublin, in 1817, MacCarthy entered St. Patrick's Seminary, Maynooth, in August 1832, but was not ordained as a priest. In 1834, MacCarthy began publishing his verse in the *Dublin Satirist* periodical, going on to contribute to important journals such as *The Dublin University Magazine* and *The Nation*, to which he contributed patriotic verse under the pseudonym "Desmond." He was associated with the revolutionary Young Irelanders, but does not appear to have been an active nationalist. According to Charles Gavan Duffy, one of the Young Ireland leaders, MacCarthy "counted for little in the political counsels of the party" (126), although he had earlier quoted Lecky's assertion that "what the *Nation* was when Gavan Duffy edited it, when Davis, M'Carthy, and their brilliant associates contributed to it, and when its columns maintained with unqualified zeal the cause of liberty and nationality in every land, Irishmen can never forget" (71). In 1846, MacCarthy compiled an anthology of Irish writing for "Duffy's Library of Ireland." Written while he was associated with the Young Irelanders, his preface to *The Poets and Dramatists of Ireland* is tinged with the political feelings of the time. The anthology was intended to counteract a literary act of union that had occurred long before the political union with England in 1800, in so far as "the principles of imperialism had been applied to our literature,"

1 I would like to thank Prof. Rodrigo Cacho for his help in obtaining some secondary sources.

meaning that the best Irish poets and intellectuals had gone to London (vii). The objective of the anthology, then, was to redefine Irish writing by including works by writers born in Ireland, but not usually associated with it. In this way the anthology is an experiment to see whether "the men of intellect who have gone out from amongst us" can "supply the literary wants, and support the dignity of a nation" (ix).

In his introduction to *The Book of Irish Ballad*s, also published in 1846, MacCarthy indicates his moderate nationalism, stating "we can be thoroughly Irish in our feelings without ceasing to be English in our speech" (25). This view directly contradicts the stance of Young Ireland leader Thomas Davis, who argued that "to lose your native tongue, and learn that of an alien, is the worst badge of conquest − it is the chain on the soul" (55). However, MacCarthy wrote in his 1846 preface to *The Poets and Dramatists of Ireland*: "we have to acknowledge with grief and shame, that we are ignorant of the native language of our country" (x). In *The Book of Irish Ballads*, MacCarthy further recognises the advantage to the Irish nation of recovering her Irish-language literature, even in translation, when he asks how difficult it would be for "the best disposed and the most patriotic amongst us to free our minds from the false impressions which the study (superficial as it was) of the history of our country, as told by those who were not her children or her friends, had made upon us" (24). In other words, a sense of cohesion and national dignity is found in a study of the native literature to counteract the negative view imposed by the cultural pressures from England.

Before his first translation from Calderón, MacCarthy had expressed his admiration for the Spanish romances in his introduction to *The Book of Irish Ballads* (18-19). Whereas the romances he mentions might not be considered ballads in the strictest sense of the term, he treats them as such here. The essay provides a clear illumination of the nationalistic importance of ballads generally to MacCarthy, who writes that "the most ponderous folio that ever owed its existence to the united efforts of industry and dulness, must fail in giving a perfect idea of the character of a people, unless it be based upon the revelations they themselves have made, or the confessions they have uttered." Without the ballads, then, history is but a "dry dead catalogue of dates and facts, useless either as a picture of the past, or as a lesson for the future" (15). It is this idea that ballads tell the history of a country, and are "a lesson for the future," which shows the nation-forming function that they have for the author.

After his attention was directed to Calderón by a passage in an essay by Shelley, MacCarthy's first translation of Calderón's work, a translation of scenes from *El Purgatorio de San Patricio* accompanied by an introductory

essay, was published in *Duffy's Irish Catholic Magazine* in 1847. In *Calderón's Dramas* MacCarthy quotes Archbishop Trench's remarks about an English translation of Calderón's *Mago prodigioso* by J.H., that "'the writer did not possess that command of the resources of the English language, which none more than Calderon requires'" (xiii).[2] This lexical requirement was even more difficult for an English-speaking Irishman. In *Dramas of Calderón*, however, MacCarthy writes tellingly of the "delight with which a translator is driven impulsively, almost as by an original inspiration, to reproduce in his native tongue, those harmonies which have so enchanted him in another," a decidedly incongruous statement for a Young Irelander, who would have realised the significance of terming English his native tongue (iv). The year before his death, MacCarthy won a medal in a competition organised by the Real Academia Española for an English translation of the Spanish writer, in celebration of the tri-centenary of Calderón's death. MacCarthy had been a *correspondiente* of the Real Academia Española before this. He died in Blackrock, Co. Dublin, in 1882 and is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin.

MacCarthy's interest in Calderón was mirrored in, and complemented by, the work of contemporaries in Ireland, England, and on the continent. In Ireland, MacCarthy's contemporary James Clarence Mangan translated from many languages for the pages of the *Dublin University Magazine*, and among them we find his translations of Spanish romances. Like Mangan, MacCarthy also translated Spanish romances in the *Dublin University Magazine*. MacCarthy's admiration for Mangan is remarked upon by the latter's biographer, D.J. O'Donoghue, who claims that MacCarthy "held Mangan in high esteem, and despite his follies, which strained the good feeling of even his greatest admirers and friends, never ceased to speak well of him" (O'Donoghue 178). In fact, Duffy quotes a letter from John O'Hagan in which he feels that MacCarthy emulated Mangan unsuccessfully:

> '*Apropos* of rhymes, MacCarthy in that long poem of his about Ceim-an eich, some stanzas of which were exceedingly beautiful, fell into a great mistake in trying to ride Mangan's phooca. In the original himself there is a curious felicity which prevents us from being annoyed at his forced rhymes, but in any one else it does not do at all.' (Duffy 137-138)

O'Donoghue writes that MacCarthy and Mangan did meet occasionally at Father Meehan's Presbytery in Lower Exchange Street, Dublin, and so were at least acquainted (146). It would be mere speculation, however, to deduce from this professional and personal relationship that MacCarthy followed Mangan's

2 The translation was *Justina* (1848).

example as a translator of Spanish verse, although it might be seen that both writers shared a common source in their interest in Spanish writing.

Mangan, although he knew Spanish, most likely became interested in the romances due to the enthusiasm for Iberian topics in early nineteenth century English journals such as *The Quarterly Review*. In *Dramas of Calderón*, MacCarthy himself makes clear that the publication of Black's "translation of the 'Dramatic Literature' of Augustus W. Schlegel, about the year 1815, imparted to a wider public the intelligence that the lost Pleiad of the great European constellation of dramatists had reappeared" (*Dramas of Calderón* xx). In other words, Calderón's dramatic works came to the attention of the English public largely as a result of the translation of Schlegel's work. The enthusiasm shown for Calderón's writings in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany, when German writers translated extensively from the Spanish writer, aroused great interest in Calderón among the Romantics, and particularly Percy Bysshe Shelley. MacCarthy maintains that "among poets" Shelley appears to have been "the one who appreciated most highly the importance of the discovery" (*Dramas of Calderón* xx). By analysing MacCarthy's interaction with Calderón through Shelley, a number of important insights into his nationalism arise.

MacCarthy was taken with Spanish literature before his first translation of Calderón, yet his interest in this particular author is due to his admiration of Shelley. In *Dramas of Calderón* MacCarthy admits that it was the "resplendent pages" of Shelley's writings to which he was "indebted for [his] first introduction to the, till then unknown, world of Calderón's poetry" (vii).[3] This admiration, however, took into account what MacCarthy termed Shelley's faults. He remarks in *Dramas of Calderón* that the poet would have been a competent translator of Calderón as his translations could contain "much of the charm of his own original compositions," yet would be free from those "peculiarities of opinion and expression which must always be an obstacle to their universal popularity" (xiv). Shelley shows his radical politics, for example, in his treatment of the 1820 Spanish liberal revolts in "Ode to Liberty." It was not, however, Shelley's support of revolutions against tyranny that concerned MacCarthy, but rather the poet's anti-Catholicism. Susana Hernández-Araico writes that Shelley admired the imagery in Calderón's *autos*, variations on the mystery play that were performed for Corpus Christi, but did not accept them as dramatic works on account of their "rigidly defined […] idealisms of a dis-

3 Although it was Maria James Raveley Gisborne who first introduced him to Calderón's work.

torted superstition" (484).[4] In contrast, MacCarthy states in the introduction to his translation of *The Sorceries of Sin* that Calderón's *autos* are the "most wonderful of all his productions," and laments that they have been "passed over […] in almost utter silence" (145). In *Mysteries of Corpus Christi,* MacCarthy further maintains that a Catholic understands these plays better than a non-Catholic (35), and in this he is of the same opinion as Franz Lorinser, who, according to Henry W. Sullivan, "was using the *autos* as a weapon of religious polemic just as Eichendorff had used them as a weapon of literary polemic" (320). As a matter of fact, seven of MacCarthy's translations from Calderón are of dramas with openly religious subject-matter.

In *Shelley's Early Life*, in which MacCarthy describes Shelley's sympathies with the national cause in Ireland, the Irish poet speculates that while first-hand evidence proves that Shelley did not meet the Irish political leader Daniel O'Connell during his visit to Dublin in 1812, if the two *had* met "O'Connell would have repudiated [Shelley's] political support until he had withdrawn the atrocious calumnies on the religion of the people of Ireland, which Shelley had so innocently put forward in both of his Irish pamphlets" (xiv). This statement reveals both MacCarthy's attempt to defend Shelley and his condemnation of his attacks on Catholicism as "atrocious calumnies." Thus, MacCarthy's interest in Shelley's interaction with Calderón's *autos* is coloured with nationalism, which for MacCarthy is defined in religious terms contradictory to Shelley's views.

MacCarthy's views on Shelley also offer insight into the Irish poet's views on translation. Shelley and Coleridge, MacCarthy maintained, were able to make translation a "divine" art, having "taken away the despair which began to be felt of English poetry ever being able to produce any of those perfect facsimiles of foreign works of genius which form so important and interesting a portion of German literature" (*Dramas of Calderón* ix). MacCarthy reveals his conviction that translation should be given a new status equal to original writing when he avers that, in metrical questions, "English-translated verse" should be able to "compete either with the perfection of English original poetry or with the photographic fidelity of German translation" (*Dramas of Calderón* xii). Such an approach to translation would dignify the translator's work, which had, to his mind, "as a distinct branch of the poetical art, […] fallen, perhaps not undeservedly, low in the opinion of the public" (*Dramas of Calderón* viii). Generally speaking, MacCarthy argues that English-language translation can be ren-

4 Hernández-Araico is quoting from a letter to John Gisborne, November 1820 (see Ingpen and Peck 221, and Jordan 44).

dered more versatile when the translator endeavours to reproduce the different poetic rhymes and metres found in the source language. As such, translation, for MacCarthy, is essentially creative work, although translators would have to "struggle against their own instincts, which prompt them to original composition" (*Dramas of Calderón* viii-ix). Speaking of Shelley as a translator, MacCarthy maintains that "his translated poetry is, no doubt, clothed in a more subdued drapery of words than that 'flaming robe of verse' in which most of his original conceptions are enfolded; but perhaps no other English poet's style could so well bear those occasional diminutions of splendour which the necessary restrictions of translation occasion" (*Dramas of Calderón* vii-viii). For MacCarthy, then, one can be a faithful translator without surrendering creativity, as absolute fidelity is not merely a mechanical reproduction of the source text.

MacCarthy's idea that one can reproduce "perfect facsimiles" of source texts, when speaking of German translators in 1853, does seem rather naïve to us nowadays. Writing in 1861, however, MacCarthy still maintained that the translator should be faithful to the source text. However, he feigns a disinterest in taking sides in the famous debate on translation between Francis W. Newman and Matthew Arnold, arguing "it is by no means my intention to enter into the oft-debated question as to the principles which should guide or coerce the translator in his task," although he does actually declare his support of Newman (*Three Dramas of Calderón* viii). Weissbort and Eysteinsson hold that Newman advocated fidelity to the source text. Arnold responded that "probably both sides would agree" on this, but the question "at issue between them is, in what faithfulness consists" (227). While MacCarthy agrees "with what Mr. Newman has said upon this subject," it remains a "matter of taste" whether one translates faithfully or freely. As such, "no definite rule can ever be arrived at in the matter," as the effect produced will "depend upon the capacity and culture of the reader" (*Three Dramas of Calderón* viii). In *Three Dramas of Calderón* MacCarthy quotes from the preface to *The Iliad of Homer* to show that he is of the same mind as Newman, who alludes to critics of his work who lay down the axiom that the reader ought to forget that he is reading a translation and "be lulled into the illusion that he is reading an original work." This view considers that all that has "a foreign colour is undesirable, and is even a grave defect," and entails the translator "obliterate all that is characteristic of the original, unless it happens to be identical in spirit to something already familiar in English" (*Three Dramas of Calderón* viii-ix). Newman states his opposition to this view, writing "I aim at precisely the opposite," namely to retain every "peculiarity of the original, as far as I am able, *with the greater care, the*

more foreign it may happen to be, whether it be matter of taste, of intellect, or of morals" (*Three Dramas of Calderón* ix). MacCarthy asserts that he has acted on this principle in *Three Dramas of Calderón*. He adds that "the peculiar feature" of his translation is its "adherence to the metres of the original" (*Three Dramas of Calderón* ix). As a specimen of MacCarthy's efforts to reproduce the "peculiarities of the originnal" we have his assertion in *Calderón's Dramas* that he translates Calderón with an eye to reproducing the large variety of metres the Spanish author used:

> all the forms of verse have been preserved; while the closeness of the translation may be inferred from the fact, that not only the whole play but every speech and fragment of a speech are represented in English in the exact number of lines of the original, without the sacrifice, it is to be hoped, of one important idea. (*Calderón's Dramas* vii-viii)

This, according to André Lefevere, is a difficult task, as a metrical translator tends to prolixity (39). MacCarthy feels he is opening new ground in trying to reproduce Spanish metrical patterns in English, writing that he "takes possession of almost unoccupied ground" (*Dramas of Calderón* vii). He could be referring to English or Irish literature here. In the nineteenth century, Irish writers using the English language often did not make the distinction between British and Irish literature clear, highlighting that definitions of Irishness were still at an embryonic stage.

What, on first sight, seems pedantry is actually a decision invested with the viewpoint of a writer from a minor culture, and can be interpreted as a counter-argument to the tendency among English translators to anglicise all aspects of foreign texts, thus erasing their national "peculiarities." It is a statement of cultural superiority. On the other hand, the attempt to reproduce all the "peculiarities" of the source text is a statement of cultural equality, and an interest in all that is foreign. It is a characteristic of new cultures and new literatures that need to look beyond colonial power.

In summary, while MacCarthy was a moderate nationalist associated with the Young Irelanders, he was not active politically. His translations, however, demonstrate certain nationalistic feelings, although his is a nationalism that empathises more with the Catholic Calderón than the sceptic Shelley. Viewed from this perspective, MacCarthy's translations are literary works that enrich not only English literature, but also Irish literature in English, and can be seen as a literary effort to dignify a Catholic Irish nationalism, as well as to further dignify Irish literature and enlarge its corpus. Furthermore, while his objective in adapting Calderón was to be a faithful translator, through this fidelity he hoped to adhere to the foreign text, adapting it as little as possible to the target

culture, showing that he did not see translation as a means of requisitioning the source literature, but rather as a means of opening up the target literature and culture to new worlds.

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