

AN ARGENTINEZED TRANSLATION OF THE SONNETS

Some years ago I felt stimulated to start an experiment: to translate the Sonnets into a variant which may be called *Riverplate Spanish*. The outstanding features of this variant is the use of the second singular person pronoun *vos*, instead of *tú*, bringing about a displacement of the verbal accent. Since the “expected” translation of a classical author is the literary Spanish, it is clear that the dialectal variety deviates from the norm. Since *vos*, as opposed to *tú*, implies familiarity or slight slang, this translation makes the Sonnets “sound” differently. It may be called a parodist translation, not because it is intended to provoke humor, but because it takes “parody” in the sense of rewriting. However, since it becomes “marked” as a translation, the comic result cannot be left aside. My purpose is to analyze several choices I made as regards phonic, syntactic, lexical and stylistic aspects. It is to be observed that some reviewers agreed to the fact that these sonnets rewritten in the Argentine idiom resemble tango lyrics.

In any case my version might appear in a way revolutionary because it introduces the Riverplate dialect in the translation of “classical” Shakespeare. Not the dramas, which can be expected to be translated, recycled and adapted to local expectations, but Shakespeare’s lyrical poems. Experiments are endless.

I propose in this article to give an account of my poetic translation of Shakespeare’s Sonnets into Riverplate Spanish¹. In some remarkable cases, I examine the difficulties that I have faced. I briefly state results that seem acceptable, with the purpose of mitigating the repeated judgment about “what is lost in the translation”. There are also critical observations and self-critical remarks about my choices.

1 MIGUEL A. MONTEZANTI, *Sólo vos sos vos. Los Sonetos de Shakespeare en traducción rioplatense*, Eudem, Mar del Plata, 2011/2019.

I have published two poetic translations of Shakespeare's Sonnets.² The first (1987-2003) uses what may be called standard literary Spanish, whereas the second, an experimental one, is a translation into the Riverplate (not peninsular) Spanish (2011/2019-2019). This translation can be termed deviant or heterodox.

To speak of a Riverplate dialect constitutes a more or less subjective construct. The usage of the pronoun *vos*, instead of *tú*, together with the displacement of the verbal accent are its outstanding characteristics. Since *vos* implies familiarity or informality, it is clear that this translation "sounds" like a parodist translation, not because it is mainly concerned with humor: I take the term "parody" as rewriting. However, for the same reason that it deviates from the cultured literary norm, the comic result is impossible to hide. The displacement of the verbal accent has left the imprint of a greater number of oxitone rhymes, *i.e.* the stress falls on the last syllable of the verb instead of falling on the previous one.

The Argentine more noticeable phonetic features are the so called *seseo* and *yeísmo*. The former implies pronouncing "c" before "e" and "i" and pronouncing "z" as sibilants, like "s". In peninsular Spanish "c" and "z" are pronounced as the voiceless interdental fricative, whereas "s" is a voiceless palatal or alveolar fricative. In my translation a word like *esposo* ("husband") rhymes perfectly with *gozo* ("delight").

In the case of *yeísmo* what is written with double "l" ("ll"), and pronounced as a voiced lateral becomes similar to what is written with "y", and pronounced commonly as a voiced palatal fricative. Perfect or consonantal rhyme, just as an example, is considered to occur in words like *embrollo* ("imbroglio") and *yo* ("I").

In some other cases I have relied on popular, naïve pronunciation of people not knowing English but using very common English terms. People not knowing any English would pronounce what they "read", *i.e.* using Spanish sounds to decode the letters of an English item. For example "affaires" (*afaires*) sounds such as it is written to make the word rhyme with *aires* ("airs"): s. 57, l. 19. ("Where you may be, or your affaires suppose..."). The same applies to the word "nurse", pronounced as a disyllable, in s. 22, l. 2, *como una nurse cuida a su bebé* ("As tender nurse her babe from faring ill").

2 MIGUEL A. MONTEZANTI, *William Shakespeare Sonetos completos*. Traducción y notas Miguel A. Montezanti, UNLP, La Plata 1987; Longseller, Buenos Aires 2003.

As regards rhyme: in Spanish the so called consonantal or perfect rhyme requires the coincidence of all the sounds following the tonic vowel including it. Strictly speaking the rhymes shown in this translation are not consonant but assonant. However, the discrepancies are almost insignificant; for example the final sound of a word in plural, *i.e.* a final “s” in the case of a noun or the final “n” in the case of a verb. In s. 151, l. 2, *salta* (“jumps”) rhymes with *faltas* (l. 4: “misconduct”), the final “s” of the latter being the only one discrepancy. In s. 106, l. 13 *roce*, meaning “contact” rhymes with *voces* (l. 14: “voices”), the same phenomenon as before, an extra “s”. I have used deliberately four pairs of assonant verses in the famous sonnet 130, the well known non-idealized description of the beloved woman. I decided not to diminish the impact of the underrating stereotyped, Petrarchan, comparisons, thus creating a humorous effect. I made up my mind to be more faithful to the tone than to the translations restraints I have imposed upon myself for the whole sequence.

The stylistic aspect is undoubtedly the richest and the most disturbing for an unprepared reader who hopes to encounter a “classical” translation of a classic. The Riverplate *vos*, implying a more intimate or familiar interpersonal relationship, is accompanied by some lexical, stylistic and grammatical liberties. One of these features is the use of pleonastic pronouns, either dative or accusative or both. The subjective nuances are subtle, sometimes ungraspable. By way of example, *No le parás al tiempo la guadaña*, s. 12, l. 13 (“And nothing ‘gainst Time’s scythe can make defence”); *No me le atrevo a profecía alguna* (s. 14, l. 5) (“Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell”).

Another feature has to do with diminutives having an aesthetic and intimate character. These choices, I feel, are not capricious if the respective English contexts are taken into account. Thus, s. 14, l. 2, *aunque un poquito sé de astronomía* translates (“although I know a bit of astronomy”) translates “And yet methinks I have astronomy”. In s. 18, l. 3, *El viento bate al capullito enano* (“the wind beats the dwarf bloom”) translates “Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May”. In s. 25, l. 6, *pero al sol, igual que una florcita*, (“but to the Sun, like a little flower”) corresponds to “But as the marygold at the sun’s eye”. Finally, in s. 73, l. 4, *coros donde no cantan pajaritos* (“choirs where little birds do sing”) translates “Bare choirs where late the sweet birds sang”.

Interpreting the texts I have tilted in favor of a “made”, stereotyped, colloquial phrase, rather than in favor of a “literary” diction. In

some cases, however, the original idea becomes somehow blurred or transformed into a somehow reckless result. For example, in s. 11, l. 7, referred to the reluctance of the celebrated young man to start an offspring, the poet warns "If all were minded so, the times should cease", which is translated *si vos pensás así se acaba el cuento* ("If you think like this the story is finished"). In s. 26, l. 12, when the poet reveals that his bonds with the Fair Youth will not be apparent, "Till then, not show my head where thou mayst prove me", becomes: *pero entretanto, mutis por el foro*, a proverbial expression in Spanish which, by the way, is taken from the theatrical jargon, which is not completely distanced from the atmosphere pervading the Sonnets. In s. 3, l. 7, "Or who is he so fond will be the tomb", is translated as *¿o quién que por quedarse en piel y hueso* ("Or who will be reduced to skin and bones"), where "skin and bone", *piel y hueso*, evokes currently somebody who is extraordinarily lean and next to death by starvation. In s. 82, l. 2, "And therefore mayst without attaint o' erlook", the translation reads *y así podés hacer la vista gorda* ("and so you can turn a blind eye"), where the Castilian idiom corresponds almost exactly to "overlook", although in an almost domestic, informal register. In s. 104, l. 3, when the poet registers the cycle of nature, stating that three winters "Have from the forest shook three summer's pride", the translation says *le han bajado el copete a tres veranos*, where the popular expression *bajar el copete* means "to put in the proper place somebody who is boasting or pompous". The colloquial phrase is hardly exempt from a comic nuance. This is sometimes more obvious, although it does not exactly match the sense. In s. 140, l. 11: "Now this ill-wresting world has grown so bad", the translation reads: *y como el mundo anda mal del coco*, something like, "and as the world is going nuts". Another example is the couplet of s. 151, with a strong sexual innuendo: "No want of conscience hold it that I call / Her 'love' for whose dear love I rise and fall". The translation reads: *Mi conciencia al final no se rebaja / sirviéndole tu amor de subibaja*, something like "My conscience in the end is not diminished, / and your love serves it like a seesaw".

Other expressions are temporal dialects, or *cronolectos*, as they are called in Spanish. In my example *de movida*, means "from the beginning", "immediately", "without delay". In S. 90, l. 11: "But in the onset come so shall I taste", is turned into *venite de movida, y yo primero*. Shakespeare sometimes uses legal technicalities to illustrate the amorous sentiment or intricacies. The choice of these expressions implies a cont-

rastrast between the sophisticated and the colloquial. The most obvious sonnet in this regard is 87, where the poet shows his will to renounce his privilege denouncing a tricky agreement based on the donor's misapprehension of the situation. l. 4, "My bonds with thee are all determinate", becomes *se te acabaron las obligaciones*. And l. 8, "And so my patent back again is swerving" becomes *que vuelva a vos, por tanto, mi patente*.

Concrete expressions in TT can try to match more cultured or abstract items in ST. S. 4, l. 11, "Then how when Nature calls thee to be gone" is turned into: *y así cuando te llamen al osario* ("and so, when you be summoned to the ossuary"). In s. 35, l. 2 "Roses have thorns and silver fountains mud", becomes *barro en las fuentes hay, pinche en la rosa*, where *pinche* is more colloquial than *espina* ("thorn"). A very popular comparison appears in the translation of s. 108, l. 9 "So that eternal love, in love's fresh case", becomes *fresco mi amor como lechuga*, a popular comparison in Argentina (fresh my love as lettuce). Some degree of intimacy is achieved in s. 65, l. 4, "Whose action is no stronger than a flower"; *si su acción, como flor, es debilucha*, ("if its action is as weak as a flower"). The suffix *-ucho/a* is sometimes pejorative and sometimes affectionate, as in the present case. In specific lexical issues the general rule may be defined thus: I have preferred the colloquial variant to the more cultured or refined. For example in s. 1, l. 12, "churl" is turned into *amarrete*, a commoner word than *avaro* or *tacaño*. In s. 3, l. 3, the young man's behavior is stubborn as he refuses to have a son: the word *tozudez* used in the translation, is a bit rougher than *empecinamiento* or *obcecación*, meaning almost the same. In s. 5, l. 6, when time leads summer "To hideous winter, and confounds him there", the colloquial verb *embarulla* displaces the "standard" *confunde*. In s. 12, l. 10, the idea of eroding time becomes *el sopapo del tiempo te derriba* ("Time's slap knocks you out"). *Sopapo* is in the Argentine area a blow with the hand open on the face. In s. 17, l. 2, "And stretched meters of an antique song" is somehow boldly translated into *ritmos de algún calenturiento bocho* ("Rhythms out of some feverish head"). *Bocho* is substandard or slightly slang for "head". The effect is downgrading the *furor poeticus* implied in Shakespeare's "And your true rights be termed a poet's rage". In s. 23, l. 1, "As an imperfect actor on the stage" is translated as *Como un actor chambón sobre las tablas*. *Chambón* is a popular word indicating clumsiness or lack of training and finesse for a task.

Some lexical choices may achieve a humorous effect because of anachronism. Such is the case of the famous sonnet 116 and the contro-

versial line 4, “Or bends with the remover to remove”. Through many translations consulted only one employs in Spanish the verb *remover*. The line appears in my recent translation *o si se quita con removedor* (“Or if it is removed with a remover”). The noun refers to a chemical used to remove old paint. It is an anachronism but not far away from the predominant image in s.116 on the solidity and immutability of true love.

I feel entitled to say that the experiment of a Riverplate domestication of the Sonnets meets insurmountable difficulties. There are Sonnets having a lyrical intensity that it does not seem possible to “lower” the language level to the colloquial expression. Compared both versions, 1987 / 2003 and 2011/2019, and the latter with other translators’ versions, my new version does not differ significantly from the cult Spanish rule. Examples of this include sonnets 7 and 33, referring to the solar cycle in relation to behaviors or attitudes that involve the Fair Youth. I have not found ways to “colloquialize” these expressions. By way of example I offer the translation of the first line of each of these sonnets depending on my 1987 / 2003 version and the 2011/2019 one: s. 7, “Lo, in the orient when the gracious light”: *Mira, cuando la luz en el oriente* (“Look, when light in the East” (1987 / 2003); *Fijáte, cuando el sol en el oriente* (2011/2019). *Fijáte* is a colloquial term calling one’s attention to something, but the rest of the line remains almost the same. In s. 73 “That time of year thou mayst in me behold” becomes *Puedes mirar en mí la época del año* (1987/2003) and *Podés mirar en mí la temporada* (2011/2019); the local mark is only given by the displacement of the verbal accent. There is a nuance of a more popular style in the choice of *temporada* but not much more.

As regards meter, some endecasyllables, i.e. the 11-syllable line used in Spanish sonnets, are not perfect. These faulty lines are included on purpose and have to do with the overall target of this version. For example, in s. 44, l. 2 *las leguas no me frenarían el paso* (“leagues would not stop my step”), there is a slight stress on *no*, which should go unstressed. (“Injurious distance should not stop my way”), Similarly, in s. 32, l. 11 *sería su posición más aceptable* (“its stance would be more acceptable”) demands the pronunciation of *sería* as *seriá*. (“A dearer than this love had brought his birth”).

A couple of closing remarks: 1) I have not used the so called dirty words, with only one very “innocent” exception, a verb that in Riverplate Spanish means to disturb, to bother or to upset, and is said everywhere (s. 94, l. 1). 2) I have not resorted to the so called *gauchesco*, i.e. the

jargon used in the *literatura gauchesca*: this sophisticated language was devised by cultured writers trying to imitate the rural or the *gaucho* register and lexis. The best example is the most popular *gauchesco* poem, *Martín Fierro*, by José Hernández. 3) My third observation relates to *lunfardo*. *Lunfardo* is a jargon used in the big cities of Argentina, originally in the suburbs. The definition is controversial. For years the predominant description has referred to it as a jargon used by outlaws in order to cheat the police. Nowadays this concept has been softened by some scholars, who support the idea that *lunfardo* is used by people getting some confidence with others. Many words of the *lunfardo* which have formerly been considered taboo or substandard come again into use and few remember their non recommendable usage. In my translation I have not used *lunfardo* terms except in one case, *jovato* (s. 138) meaning an old man. 4) I have used in the present paper the word “humor” and “humorous”: my purpose has not been to arouse humor but to translate Shakespeare Sonnets into this local, Riverplate variety of Spanish.

Perhaps the result cannot help being humorous on the strength that deviation from standard literary language achieves a somehow quizzical effect. But I insist on the fact that my primary intention was not related to achieve comic effects. 5) Something that called vividly my attention was that some reviewers stated that my version resembled tango lyrics. It was not my purpose, again, to imitate tango lyrics. But one thought came into my mind, the following: whenever you express the main characteristics of love, *i.e.* jealousy, complaints, infidelity, in the Riverplate variety of Spanish, the result is something like a variety of tango lyrics. Can we imagine a Buenos Aires singer singing a choice of Shakespeare's Sonnets?

In fact, one critic said that the translation is interesting though unnecessary: tango has better representatives in inventing lyrics, for example Homero Manzi, a true tango poet. I admit that the translation of s. 141, l. 12, “Who leaves unswayed the likeness of a man”, *Sólo me queda de hombre el cascarón* (“I am reduced to the shell of a human being”) seems to expect the end of the musical notes “sol-do” to conclude a plaintive mood of tango after a passionate relationship. 6) I insist on the fact that my translation has been an experiment. In fact, I do not recommend this translation to my students, who are starting to become acquainted with Shakespeare's Sonnets.

Professor Juan Jesús Zaro, from the University of Málaga, states this judgment: «It is possible that from Spain this translation be consi-

dered primarily an experiment, bold and unprecedented, but the truth is that in Argentina it acquires other nuances that, from this side of the Atlantic, we cannot overlook: the hybrid, close, intimate and irreverent character of the text is emphasized, which interrogates the supposed inviolability of the verses of Shakespeare as the written standard coming from Spain»³.

MIGUEL ANGEL MONTEZANTI
National University of La Plata

3 JUAN JESÚS ZARO, *Sólo vos sos vos*, in «*El trujamán. Revista diaria de traducción*» (2011). (https://cvc.cervantes.es/trujaman/antiores/noviembre_11/15112011.htm) (my translation).

Ամփոփում

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ՄԻԿԷԼ ԱՆԽԷԼ ՄՕՆԹԵԾԱՆԹԻ

Տարիներ առաջ, յօդուածի հեղինակը փորձարկութեան մը լծուեցաւ՝ թարգմանելու Շէյքսպիրի հնչեակները Ռիո տէ լա Փլաթայի սպաներէնի (որ կը խօսուի Արժանթինի եւ Ուրուկուայի մէջ)։ Սպաներէնի այս ճիւղին նկատելի յատկանիշներէն է եզակի երկրորդ դէմքի «VOS» դերանունի գործածութիւնը, փոխանակ դասական «tú» դերանունին։ Քանի որ Հարաւային Ամերիկայի այս շրջանի խօսակցական դերանունի գործածութիւնը ընտանեկանութիւն կ'ապացուցէ, Հնչեակներուն արտասանութիւնն ալ կը փոխուի։

Այս թարգմանութիւնը կրնանք յարերգական նկատել, ոչ երգիծական նպատակներով, այլ «յարերգութիւնը» հասկնալով իբրեւ վերաշարադրանք։ Կարելի չէ, սակայն, այս թարգմանչական նախաձեռնութեան արդիւնքին զաւեշտական երանգը անտեսել։ Յօդուածին մէջ կը քննարկուին Արժանթինեան սպաներէնի բարբառին թարգմանութեան հետ կապուած հնչիւնաբանական, շարադասական, բառագրական եւ ոճական հարցեր։ Շարք մը քննադատներու համաձայն, այս թարգմանութիւնը կը յիշեցնէ թանկոյի երգերուն խօսքերը։