

Modern Languages Lecture Series: Dr. David Lee Garrison, "The Art of Translation"

April 15, 2014, Student Union Atrium, Wright State University

A Question to Which the Answer is Unimportant

(Juan Antonio González-Iglesias, tr David Lee Garrison)

The medieval theologian
asks himself if two angels
can speak
with each other—communicate—
without the other angels hearing them.
Never mind the answer,
the only thing that matters
is the sensation,
almost physical,
that beneath those symbolic codes
there is a clear outline
of how poetry—transmitted
in some kind of book—works
its magic, this strange pleasure
offered up
from the well of the spirit
each time a lower case letter
of the alphabet is written

Cuestión Cuya Respuesta No Importa

Se pregunta el teólogo
medieval si dos ángeles
pueden
hablar—comunicarse—
sin que los otros ángeles los oigan.
No importa la respuesta
sino la sensación
casi física
de que bajo esos códigos simbólicos
se dibuja una exacta
definición de cómo
funciona la poesía
transmitida en especie
de libro, y este raro
placer que proporcionan
las cosas del espíritu
siempre
que se escriba en minúscula.

I am not I

(Juan Ramón Jiménez, tr David Lee Garrison)

I am not I.
I am the one
I do not see though he walks beside me,
the one I sometimes visit
and at other times forget.
The peaceful one who does not speak when I do,
the one who quietly forgives when I hate,
the one who walks where I am not,
the one still standing when I die.

Yo no soy yo

Yo no soy yo.
Soy éste
que va a mi lado sin yo verlo;
que, a veces, voy a ver,
y que, a veces, olvido.
El que calla, sereno, cuando hablo,
el que perdona, dulce, cuando odio,
el que pasea por donde no estoy,
el que quedará en pie cuando yo muera.

Inscripción para el sepulcro de Domingo Greco

(Luis de Góngora y Argote)

Esta en forma elegante, oh peregrino,
de pórvido luciente dura llave,
el pincel niega al mundo más suave
que dio espíritu a leño, vida a lino.

Su nombre, aún de mayor aliento dino
que en los clarines de la Fama cabe,
el campo ilustra de ese mármol grave:
venéralo y prosigue tu camino.

Yace el Griego. Heredó Naturaleza
Arte; y el Arte, estudio. Iris, colores.
Febo, luces—si no sombras, Morfeo—.

Tanta urna, a pesar de su dureza,
lágrimas beba, y cuantos suda olores
corteza funeral de árbol sabeo.

Computer translation of the first stanza of this sonnet:

This elegantly, oh Pilgrim, Luciente porphyry hard key, the brush denies the world more soft, which gave spirit to lino, life to flax.

Literal translation of the first stanza:

This in form elegant, oh pilgrim,
of porphyry shining hard key,
the paintbrush denies the world most soft
that gave spirit to wood, life to linen.

Prose “bridge” translation by Elias L. Rivers:

This elegantly formed, hard key, oh pilgrim, of shining porphyry denies to the world the softest brush which ever gave breath to wood, life to linen (canvas). His name, worthy of even greater blasts than Fame’s trumpets are capable of, illuminates the surface of this solemn marble: venerate it and continue your journey. Here lies the Greek. Nature has inherited his Art; and Art, his skill. The rainbow, his colors. Phoebus (the sun), his lights—or shadows, Morpheus (sleep, dreams)—. Let this great urn, despite its hardness, absorb our tears and the odors sweated by the funereal bark of the Arabian tree (myrrh).

Inscription for the Tomb of Domingo Greco

(tr David Lee Garrison)

This elegant porphyry, oh pilgrim, forms a hard
and shiny key that locks the world forever
from what was once the subtlest brush that ever
brought life to canvas, spirit into wood.

His name is worthy of more breath than Fame
can summon to send forth her clarion call,
and it graces with its luster all this sol-
emn marble. Pause and venerate his name.

Here lies the Greek. He granted Nature
Art and Art the study of his work; he gave
Iris colors, Phoebus lights, or Morpheus shades.

Let this great urn, despite its hardness, nurture
us: let it drink our tears and keep within the grave
that funeral bark whose incense slowly fades.