COMPLETE TRANSLATIONS BY PALMER BOVIE

While the Classics have a terrific past, there always remains some question as to their future. But looking back over recent decades, one might suggest that their future lies to a large extent in the hands of their translators. The use and knowledge of Greek and Latin literature is widely available today because of the abundance of new translations. They have brought the general reader whole works, in wholly new versions, many masterpieces and a considerable variety of minor pieces. We have access to what classical authors wrote on a scale not dreamed of in 1938 when Random House hazarded the publication of *The Complete Greek Drama,* edited by Oates and O'Neill, in two volumes, at the exorbitant price of five dollars.

Surely modern readers a decade hence will benefit from the further accessibility, through new translations, of complete classical works, and will have more to choose from and to compare and criticize, if the translators keep going. Two decades ago we gained a new prospect from the realm of gold in Richmond Lattimore's exemplary if formidable verse translation of the *Iliad.* This view was soon complemented by Robert Fitzgerald's pristine and enchantingly new *Odyssey.* Soon afterwards there was William Arrowsmith's completely contemporary, hard, handsome, *Satyricon.* And meanwhile the University of Chicago Press was spinning out, under the editorship of Grene and Lattimore, a *Complete Greek Tragedy.* Arrowsmith also contributed brilliantly to this enterprise (as did other unsung heroes like John Moore) and then went on, apparently without pausing for breath, to establish a new complete Aristophanes, with the lustrous assistance of Lattimore and Douglass Parker. To indicate the remarkable energy of these scholars it is enough to record the fact that within the past few years Lattimore has produced an *Odyssey,* Fitzgerald an *Iliad,* and Arrowsmith forged ahead as the impresario of a wholly new series of translations of the whole of Greek tragedy.

Last year the Rutgers University Press published a complete Terence in modern verse translation under my editorship, and at present I am trying to interest publishers in a complete Plautus—but

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twenty comedies seems to be a tall order. Meanwhile many single Roman comedies have been newly translated and published in groups of four or five. After ***Five Roman Comedies,*** under my editorship, had been published, then remaindered, by Dutton, the Director of a University Press asked one of the contributors to that volume if she would consider doing a Plautus for him. That may be a straw in the wind. But what I want to emphasize is complete runs, the whole of something. If we can produce entirely new versions of all twenty of Plautus' plays, for instance, we will know much more about his sense of theatre, his sense of humor, his ideas, his style, than we do by reading and using in courses only a certain number of his creations. I took some ten years laboring over Lucretius and while endeavoring to complete my work was overtaken by the appearance of Rolfe Humphries' version, but neither crowds the other off the scene. The only "definitive" version is the original text; and even the most conscientious classical scholar does not pore over his classic in the exclusive privacy of his study or his own mind: he teaches, interprets, or translates it, shaping the original in his own words with his own style and such insight as he can bring to bear on it. And one translation can perhaps lend wings to another.

An instance of this is Humphries' translation of Ovid's ***Metamorphoses,*** issued some two decades ago, and the first to make available in fluent modern verse this amazing poem., It was followed by Horace Gregory's admirable translation, and there have been others since in both verse and prose. But before Humphries we did not have the ***Metamorphoses*** at hand, to thumb through from beginning to end. This work was a genuine contribution to practical knowledge and now that we have not only it but several, all survive study and seem not so much to compete as to co-exist. They may compete for our attention but what they draw our attention to is Ovid, to the aesthetic and psychological contours of his poem. They let us look extensively into what mythology meant and implied to a sophisticated classical writer like Ovid.

For lyric poetry, to speak only of the Latin side, several versions of Ovid's love poetry have been published, the most compelling among them being A. Guy Lee's free and confident ***Amores,*** in couplets, beatuifully printed in a hardbound edition with the Latin text on facing pages. Catullus has enjoyed a similar treatment at the hands of Ormsby and Myers in the Dutton edition of the complete poems, and in James Michie's translation. Having the Latin to compare

surely does not detract from the study of either the Classics or their modern equivalents—witness the silent approval, through continuous use, of the Loeb Classical Library, an invaluable series of complete translations produced by careful scholars, which eschew style while they bring in profits for the Harvard University Press. This confrontation principle is now being applied where possible, in the Catulluses, in Michie's translation of Horace's ***Odes,*** in Lee's ***Amores.***

The setting of a translation beside its original is used to advantage in two recent translations of Martial, Dudley Fitts' and James Michie's. Matching the restrained compass of the epigram, this transformat suits Martials' stylish bagatelles very nicely. In Hades he is no doubt gloating over modern reproductions of his airy nothings, which first bent Latin to the task of being brief:

III.90

volt, non volt dare Galla mihi, nec dicere possum
quod volt et non volt, quid sibi Galla velit.

Lines Written in Dejection
Near a Hen-Coop
She will, she won't: she won't, she will:
so what am I to do?
Will she, or won't she will until
she won't? I think so too.
(Fitts)

Or:

She's half-and-half inclined
To sleep with me. No? Yes?
What's in that tiny mind?
Impossible to guess.
(Michie)

Or, again from Michie:

Profecit poto Mithridate saepe veneno
toxica ne possent saeva nocere sibi.
tu quoque cavisti cenando tam male semper
ne posses umquam, Cinna, perire fame

By daily making himself sick
With minuscule drops of arsenic
King Mithridates once built up
Immunity to the poison-cup.
In the same way, your small, vile dinner
Saves you from death by hunger, Cinna.
(V.76;

Other modern translators of Martial romp off on their own with an epigram:

Where Have I Heard That Name?
Someone named Cinna writes verses against me.
Who in the empire can he possibly be?
Cinna Gallia, Cinna Roma? Cinna Rama?
Cinna Bad the Sailor? Cinna Qua Non?
The Original Cinna, or one of the deadly Seven?
(111.9 Philip Murray)

This is certainly to take liberties with:

Versiculos in me narratur scribere Cinna
non scribit, cuius carmina nemo legit.

I translated it:

Cinna writes poems against me? He has no readers,
so how can they say that he's a writer?

But Murray's romp with the name is curiously appropriate to our post-Shakespearian sensibility: Cinna the poet is a name to conjure with. And it's funnier than Martial, if you like Murray's humor. To me, "Cinna Qua Non" catches the whole original epigram in an even neater net. Another modern translator has dealt with 47 epigrams of Martial in a free vein. Here he puts two together in one translation and ends with a word from Swift:

III. xi & III. viii
I was silly enough to use your name
in a recent epigram, Quintus,
and I spoke of your Thais (perhaps as
a change from Lais)—after all,
I could have chosen Hermione or any
other name. To make amends,
I've revised the epigram: Book 3, No. 8:
"Sextus loves Hermione." "Which Hermione?"
"Hermione the one-eyed." "Hermione lacks
one eye, but Sextus both!" Now the names
Are changed, you won't see any similarities.
Didn't a satirist say that satire
is a sort of glass, wherein beholders do
generally discover everybody's face
but their own? Names are another matter!

(Peter Porter, *After Martial*)

Here Porter, it seems to me, takes advantage of the way these two epigrams looked when Martial originally included them in Book Three. At the same time he creates the effect of looking askance at the intricate matter of being hypersensitive about-what gets "published", e.g. about what is said about you.

Like Murray, Porter writes his own epigrams, "after" Martial, not literal confrontations of the text but departures from it. How effective his method is can be judged from the following version of a theme Martial recurred to several times, discontent with being a famous dead classic:

As you know, Regulus, men are pharisaical,
They're always whoring after the classical:
They read but never praise our living writers

(Though the classics hit them like St. Vitus).
For them the time's always out of joint
And the past, being past, can't disappoint.
How they claim they miss those shady halls
Of Pompey's: or despite the balls –
Up Catulus made of the restoration
Of Jupiter's temple for a grateful nation,
How the fogies praise it because it was done
Back sometime around the year One:
Remember what Rome read in Virgil's time,
Old Ennius and the primitive sublime:
Go further down in the collective past,
Who thought Homer was going to last
And in that fashionable sump, the theatre,
Who fancied Menander a world beater?
Recall, if you can without apoplexy,
The liftetime of Ovid, so smooth and sexy,
The greatest Roman stylist only read
By Corinna, his mistress, and then in bed.
Such Injustice! but hang on a second,
Is that Fame, that creature that beckoned
With slatted sides and a charnel breath
And a club badge saying *Kiss* Me ***Death?***
Then wait a while, my books, I'll stay
Alive and unknown another day –
If I can't be famous till I'm dead
I'm in no great hurry to be read. (V.10)

Martial's twelve lines are less luxurious:

"Esse quid hoc dicam vivis quod fama negatur
et sua quod rarus tempora lector amat?"
hi sunt invidiae nimirum, Regule, mores,
praeferat antiquos semper ut illa novis.
sic veterem ingrati Pompei quaerimus umbram,
sic laudant Catuli vilia templa senes.
Ennius est lectus salvo tibi, Roma, Marone,
et sua riserunt saecula Maeonidem:
rara coronato plausere theatra Menandro:
norat Nasonem sola Corinna suum.
vos tamen o nostri ne festinate libelli:
si post fata venit gloria, non propero.

Michie's version encloses them aptly:

"Fame is denied to living authors: few
Readers give their contemporaries their "due."
Why is this so?" Well, Regulus, I'll tell you.
The character of envy is to value
The ancients higher than the moderns. So,
Nostalgically, ungratefully, we go
For shade to Pompey's antique colonnade,
So old men praise the ugly temple made
Uglier by Catulus. You read Ennius, Rome,
When Virgil was available nearer at home:

In his own century Homer's public found him
Uncouth: Menander's audience seldom crowned him
Or even clapped: though Ovid was a poet,
Corinna was the only one to know it.
But there's no cause, my little books, to worry:
If glory must be posthumous, why worry?

Both Michie and Porter convey Martial's meaning well, but in a manner different from each other's and more elaborate than Martial's. In a more leisurely way, both strive for the soul of Martial's wit.

The flurry of activity over Martial's epigrams between 1963 and 1972 resulting in eight separate volumes of translations and accompanied by sporadic versions in the magazine literature* accents a paradox Martial often rehearsed in his own work. Can one get by with single little poems? Who'll buy my trifles? Can one wrap up a batch of little poems and publish them in a volume, and expect 117 to weigh more than one? Who will read all this stuff? As he kept working at poetry in a light vein, chipping away, Martial eventually, between the years 80 and 101 A.D., built a bulky object, fifteen volumes of little verses, a total of 1,561 short poems. This work, mostly in hendecasyllabic or elegiac metre (verses, as he says, "of either eleven syllables or eleven feet": *undenis pedibusque syllabisque, X*. 10) made him something of a celebrity, famous for his inimitable wit and notorious for his coarse invective. He was a Roman to be reckoned with—"well-known," he adds, "so why should you envy me? Not as well known, of course, as the most popular race horse of the day."

. . .
et multo sale nec tamen protervo
notus gentibus ille Martialis
et notus populis (quid invidetis?)
non sum Andraemone notior caballo.

(X.10 completed)

The Martials of my fellow translators range in quantity from as few as 47 (Porter) to as many as 178 (Michie). Mine takes a step toward a complete version by including in its 451 poems all the epigrams beginning with the Book of the Games (the *Liber Spectaculorum,* published to commemorate the inauguration of the Colosseum in 80 A.D.),through Book IV, and an additional 18 "familiar epigrams" chosen from elsewhere among the twelve books of epigrams proper. The translations are in various rhythmical patterns,

* The authors, in alphabetical order: Bovie, Fitts, Humphries, R. Marcellino, Michie, B. Mills, Murray, P. Whigham.

often in blank verse, and sometimes set in different shapes, as well as in the conventional couplets, quatrains, and stanzas. I found a certain irony in Martial's having the nerve to toast the Colosseum with a series of tiny, distinctly unaweinspiring, light poems. I detected some ambivalence in Martial's hailing the importance of this monument—or perhaps when reading the Book of the Games I overheard him sigh with relief at being a simple spectator, rather than a stonemason, or a performer in the arena. So, in the first poem, for instance, I built a few flights of steps leading up to the occasion. The Roman empire now outdoes the glories of Egypt and of other monumental achievements in the world. So everyone can say "O!" I don't know whether Martial would have liked my tinkering with his verses, but I am quite sure his "ohs". like his "ahs", were breathed with strong reservations.

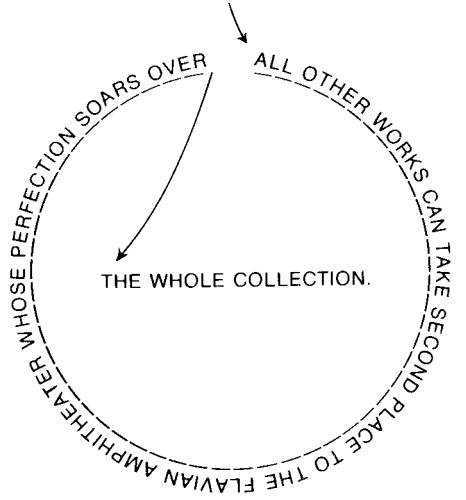
Let Memphis
astonished fall silent.
The foreign wonder of the Pyramids
no longer commands our complete attention.

Let Assyrian
architects now refrain
from boasting of Babylon.
And the sensitive citizens of Ephesus
can no longer take such pride in their vast precincts of Artemis.

The traffic
of worshipful tourists
streaming to Delos might just
as well dwindle down to nothing.

Apollo's Altar,
of solid pieces of horn
interlaced, is as good as forgotten.

And Anatolians
can cease extolling
their Mausoleum for its vaulting
through empty
space.



In another epigram I tried to catch the doubtful note sounded in the last word of the poem, "trifles." Martial, who is often rueful, seemed to me to sound disappointed with his efforts and his hopes for success. So I tried to throw the poem away.

Oh yes, that collection of trines I wrote
long ago in callow youth: I hardly recognize
the sillier items in my book of juvenilia.
If you have an hour or two to waste,
Or want to ruin some good spare time.
You can ask Quintus Pollius Valernianus
for the book.
It's thanks to him
That these insignificant things
Were granted the grace of not being
Just thrown
Away.

(I.113)

Elsewhere, my translations are comparable with and, I hope, complementary to, those of other translators. Here is I. 57, for instance. in Peter Whigham's version:

Qualem, Flacce, velim quaeris nolimve puellam?
Nolo nimis facilem difficilemque nimis.
Illud quod medium est atque inter untrumque probamus.
Nec volo quod cruciat, ner volo quod satiat.

The Mean

My taste in women, Flaccus? Give me one
neither too slow nor yet too quick to bed.
For me, the middle sort: I've not the will
To be Love's Martyr—nor his Glutton either

In translating this epigram I tried to keep the idea of the golden mean inside the poem:

What sort of girl do I want,
and not want, Flaccus?
1 don't want one to easy
or one too hard.
We approve of the middle ground,
occupied by girls who neither
fill you up or let you down.

By translating five books of epigrams in an inclusive and continuous series I hoped to convey some impression of what Martial complete might be like. Any book of selected epigrams is bound to reflect the translator choosing in advance for the reader what to read from the welter of poems first minted by this mercurial man who thought he could take the measure of Rome.

Martial's whole work lays claim to but one virtue: *hominem pagina nostra sapit (X.4)*. His subject is mainly people; and in his protean, unrepentant way he has many things to say on this multifarious subject. His style is curiously contemporary, self-conscious, mundane, personal, at times embarrassing, often arbitrary, more often than not clever and diverting, always irresistibly real. We can discover again what his pages have to offer on an entirely human subject if we read them all.

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