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## A NOTE ON TWO TRANSLATIONS OF *PARADISE LOST*

In 1812, Juan de Escoiquiz, a Spanish priest, published his verse translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Throughout the nineteenth century, the work was widely popular in Spain, and edition occasionally still appear. But the fact that the translation was written in France in the first decade of the 1800's, while Escoiquiz was imprisoned in a Paris jail, leads one to a consideration of the influence on Escoiquiz's work by Jacques Delille's French translation of *Paradise Lost*. Published in 1805, Delille's work was immediately popular and, one might believe, accessible to Escoiquiz during his time in France.

Familiar with English literature and already a translator of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, Escoiquiz doubtless admired both the poetic and the religious aspects of Milton's epic. But his approach to the work was largely that of Delille. Indeed, evidence that he was familiar with Delille's translation is given by Escoiquiz himself. Speaking of his censorship of the anti-Catholic passages, Escoiquiz remarks that "nada he cercenado del original en mi traduccion, sinó algunas alusiones, que el celebre Delille ha omitido tambien en su traduccion francesa, como ridiculas é indecentes, contra los ritos y usos de la Yglesia catholica..."<sup>1</sup> This statement is simply an echo of Delille's own remark: "[Milton] n'a pu résister au plaisir d'y placer les moines et toutes les cérémonies de l'église catholique. J'ai eu plus d'une raison de ne pas me charger de la traduction entière de ce morceau, faiblement écrit, et l'un des plus médiocres de l'ouvrage."<sup>2</sup>

But a reading of one translation against the other reveals the surprising fact that Escoiquiz's translation was made, not wholly from the English original, but from Delille's French version. Each page of Delille's translation was published facing the original. If Escoiquiz used this edition, therefore, he would have had both the English and the French versions before him. Yet his own translation inclines almost entirely toward the French rendering, although his striving for poetic effect caused him to elaborate greatly Delille's lines, creating a bombastic and conventional verse. To reveal Escoiquiz's manner of translation, then, I have chosen Book III of *Paradise Lost* for two reasons. Here one can see how he easily rendered into Spanish Delille's French adaptation of Milton's verse, translating even Delille's slight modifications. But in Book III, the famous Limbo of Vanity also appears; and in view of Delille's idea of censorship, it follows naturally that Milton's own anti-Catholic lines would be completely replaced by his own original poetry. We shall see Escoiquiz's approach to this interpolation.

After the Invocation to Light, Milton directs the reader's attention to the scene in Heaven. To do so, he depicts God, sitting on his throne and looking upon his creations. As Milton expresses it:

Now had th' Almighty Father from above,  
From the pure Empyrean where he sits  
High thron'd above all height, bent down his eye,  
His own works and their works at once to view...  
(III, 56-59)

In adapting this to the French, Delille changed the order of the phrases of the sentence, moving the subject to the end of the statement. He also introduced new ideas: the presence of a profound peace and the color "blue" as part of the heavens. Escoiquiz in his translation followed closely Delille's structure and utilized all of Delille's additions to Milton's text. One can see this similarity clearly by comparing the two passages:

Du trône où sa grandeur, dans une paix profonde,  
Domine les hauteurs qui dominent le monde,  
À travers le cristal de pur azur des cieux,  
L'Éternel ici-bas avoit jeté les yeux,  
Vu la terre et l'enfer, ce qu'il hait, ce qu'il aime,  
Et dans ses grands tableaux se contemploit lui-même.  
(I, 311)

Desde el trono invisible, y elevado,  
De donde en paz profunda, la divina,  
Incomprehensible magestad domina,  
Las alturas de todo lo criado,  
Al traves del cristal azul, y puro  
De los Cielos, el Ser eterno habia  
Dirigido la vista, a lo profundo  
Del ser.  
(I, 305)

In another instance one notes that Delille has substituted his own similes in place of Milton's. After God has concluded his speech in Heaven, the angels rejoice:

No sooner had th' Almighty ceas'd, but all  
The multitude of Angels, with a shout  
Loud as from numbers without number, sweet  
As from blest voices, uttering joy, Heav'n rung  
With Jubilee, and loud Hosannas fill'd  
Th' eternal Regions...  
(III, 344-349)

This play of one simile against the other – the angels’ voices loud yet also sweet – is a striking artistic device which Delille doubtless wished to approximate in French. But instead of the voices being loud “as from numbers without number,” he compared them to the waves of a raging sea. And the sweet voices, seen by Milton as “blest,” now became a concert of melodious voices. Escoiquiz, once again, simply followed Delille’s lead, providing almost a literal transposition from the French into Spanish:

Il dit; et, pénétré de saints ravissements,  
L’olympie entier éclate en applaudissemens.  
Bruyans comme les flots des mers tumultueuses,  
Et doux comme un concert de voix mélodieuses,  
De cris, d’accens joyeux, d’*hosanna* solennels  
Retentissent au loin les palais éternels...  
(I, 335)

Dixo, y retumbó el Cielo, enagenado  
De gozo, con aplausos tan ruidosos,  
Como los movimientos tumultuosos  
De las olas del mar alborotado,  
Y á un tiempo dulces, qual la melodia  
De un concierto de voces, arreglado  
Con el mayor esmero á la harmonia.  
Las voces, los acentos, los hosannas,  
Resuenan por las bovedas lexanas  
De los vastos palacios celestiales...  
(I, 331)

Since Escoiquiz’s version of *Paradise Lost* is twice removed from the original, it is only natural that the verse would become expanded and more complicated. Translating the succinct lines of the English poet into French, Delille himself necessarily had to expand Milton’s verse. In doing so, his translation still retains something of the conciseness of Milton’s own work. But Escoiquiz, using Delille’s ideas while at the same time desiring to exercise his own poetic imagination, had no other recourse but a further expansion of the verse. At the end of Book III, after Uriel speaks to Satan at the orb of the sun, Uriel turns away. Milton briefly expresses this action and then relates Satan to the angels’ station and conduct in Heaven:

Thus said, he turn’d; and Satan bowing low,  
As to superior Spirits is wont in Heaven,  
Where honor due reverence none neglects,

Took leave...

(III, 736-739)

Delille, for the sake of his verse, introduces the new idea of a profound silence. But more importantly, he also provides a fuller explanation of the angelic hierarchy in Heaven. Escoiquiz, working from Delille's lines, felt it necessary to make a still greater distinction. The result is an over-written, strained, and largely unpoetic passage. A comparison of the two translations shows Escoiquiz's dependence upon Delille; yet by comparing the two with Milton's own lines, quoted above, the loss of both poetic effect and the skillful succinctness is evident in Escoiquiz's second-hand rendering.

Il dit, et se détourne. En un profond silence  
Le fier Satan s'incline; ainsi l'honneur des rangs  
Distingue dans les cieux les ordres différens :  
Utile et saint devoir dont la douce puissance,  
Inspirant le respect, nourrit l'obéissance.  
Il part...

(I, 367)

Dice, y se va. En silencio, respetuoso,  
Se inclina Satanás, guardando el fuero,  
Que se debe á su clase. Con esmero  
Se hace en los cielos esta diferencia  
De rango; á cada qual exactamente  
Se tributa el honor correspondiente;  
Distincion justa, y util, que conserva  
En el publico el orden, y preserva  
De in subordinacion á todo estado  
Que entre sus sacras leyes la ha adoptado...

(I, 361)

When one considers the Limbo of Vanity passage, the full extent of Escoiquiz's obligation to Delille becomes apparent. Writing at this time in history, Delille could not bring himself to reproduce Milton's highly anti-Catholic sentiments. Such references as the mention of the "eremites and friers / White, black, and grey, with all their trumpery" (III, 474-475), "the weeds of Dominic, / Or in Franciscan... disguis'd" (III, 479-480), and the "reliques, beads, / Indulgences, dispenses, pardons, bulls, / The sport of winds" (III, 491-493) – all shocked Delille. Although he presented Milton's lines adjoining his own, Delille nevertheless wrote his own portrayal of the souls in the Limbo of Vanity. He speaks of the dreamers who never realize their many ideas, preoccupied only with their own "fantastique ouvrage" (I, 345). And he mentions further those obsessed with the desire to

change lead into gold; but in the *Paradise of Fools* “Le perfide métal s’évapore en fumée” (I, 345). And others, who in life sought material luxury and renown, now suffer the consequences of their earthly joys in things which were transitory. Escoiquiz merely translated this entire passage into Spanish, although in neither his “Prologo” nor his “Notas” does he mention the fact that the verse is original with Delille. A comparison of the last part of this passage shows Escoiquiz’s complete adherence to Delille’s verse:

D’autres vont étalant un luxe ambitieux,  
De superbes jardins, des marbres précieux;  
Mais autour d’eux (ainsi le veut la providence)  
Tout est désert, partout règne un profond silence;  
Sous leurs lambris dorés languit le triste Orgueil,  
L’indifférent Oubli seul en garde le seuil;  
Et la nymphe aux cent voix, pour eux seuls plus discrète,  
Passe les yeux fermés et baissant sa trompette.  
Bientôt dans leurs palais l’ennui vient les saisir,  
Et comme sans témoins leur luxe est sans plaisir.  
Enfin sable les reçoit, et le vent les efface.

(I, 345-347)

Hay tambien otros locos, que alli ostentan  
Un ambicioso luxo: trasladados  
Con ellos sus jardines deliciosos,  
Sus palacios de jaspe primorosos,  
Vivir felices cuentan,  
Mas, les sucede que por todos lados,  
Por que lo quiere asi la providencia,  
De un funebre desierto estan cercados,  
En que el silencio mas profundo habita:  
Baxo sus techos de oro la alegria,  
Acompañada de la complacencia,  
En vana introducirse solicita;  
El desprecio, y olvido, noche y día,  
Hacen en el umbral guarda severa;  
La Deidad de cien bocas habladora,  
Para ellos solos tiene su sonora  
Trompeta ociosa, y al pasar ligera,  
Sus ojos cierra, para no ver cosas,  
Que excitar pueda su atencion curiosa.  
Bien pronto en sus magnificas moradas  
Los persigue el fastidio, y la tristeza;  
Sin testigos, les cansa su grandeza,

Y lloran sus delicias ignoradas.  
A lo menos aspiran â la gloria  
De eternizar sus nombres; mas gravados  
En la arena, al momento estan borrados,  
Y los vientos se llevan su memoria.

(I, 342-343)

In his “Notas” for Book III, Escoiquiz speaks of the Limbo of Vanity as a fiction, “algo extravagante,” for which one should excuse Milton because it has “mucha moralidad” (I, 365). But the morality, one realizes, is neither Milton’s nor his own: it is Delille’s. Yet the same observation can be made of his entire translation. Escoiquiz sought to give the Spanish people an English masterpiece which he saw as poetical and sublime, moral and religious. Although he claims that he had learned English in Zaragoza in order to translate Young’s *Night Thoughts*<sup>3</sup>, perhaps his knowledge of English was not sufficient for him to deal with the highly polished, complex style of Milton. Delille’s translation, written in French – a language he knew well because of his many political dealings with the French government – was readily available; and Escoiquiz would have little difficulty translating from one romance language to another. In the process, however, he removed *Paradise Lost* one step further from the original. He simply repeated Delille’s variations on Milton’s lines and translated word for word Delille’s own original poetry which replaced the anti-Catholic passages, embellishing both with his own high-flown, somewhat stilted verse. Escoiquiz believed that a reading of *Paradise Lost* with the proper religious guidance revealed the virtuous way of life for mankind; and for this reason he translated the work into Spanish. In doing so, he performed a noteworthy service. Yet the path of translation led, not from the original of Milton, but by way of the French version of Jacques Delille. And in the process much of the greatness of Milton’s lines was lost.

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**Notes:**

1. Juan de Escoiquiz, *Paradiso Perdido* (Madrid, 1844), I, p. 14. Subsequent references are to this edition.
2. Jacques Delille, *Paradis Perdu* (Paris, 1805), I, p. 370. Subsequent references are to this edition.
3. Juan de Escoiquiz, *Memorias*, in Biblioteca de Autores Españoles (Madrid, 1957), p. 4.

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Reference: *Revue de littérature comparée*, vol. 41, 1967, p. 411-416.