



Keown, Dominic and Tom Owen (eds. and trans.), *A Translation into English of the Selected Verse of Vicent Andrés Estellés* (John Benjamins, 2013), 242pp. ISBN: 978-90-272-4011-8

Despite the years that have passed since Valencian poet Vicent Andrés Estellés started writing, he published, under political and cultural pressure from the Franco regime towards the Catalan language, a poignantly small amount of work amidst the totality of his vast poetic production. These circumstances, which affected the chronological visibility of his poetry, have also been impediments to the expansion of his literary figure internationally. The linguistic barrier – at least – has now collapsed; Dominic Keown and Tom Owen have introduced an English-speaking readership to his works with the publication of his selected verse by John Benjamins. The volume, divided into five different parts, resituates and expands the poetic figure of Vicent Andrés Estellés within the European literary panorama of the 20th century. The selected poems that the reader encounters in this magnificent volume are all translated from his *Collected Works*, published in 1976. With this reading, we enter Estellés' world, inevitably finding ourselves drawn to a particular attitude of mind where the stream of life bursts from the nuances, the passion, the poignant beauty of his lines, as revealed through his sublime mastery of the Valencian variety of the Catalan language.

The first quality that strikes us, as readers, is not the meaning of his lines – charged as they are – but something much more sudden and

shocking: the rebelliousness of his language. He impregnates his poems with expressions and figures of speech that refer to the specific world of the *Horta* in València. When we as readers immerse ourselves in these words we can easily imagine the clear lines of the fields of the *Horta*, and the sensuality of the oral Valencian variety. This is his characteristic quality, the essence of a particular segment of Catalan culture that transcends into the universality of time through the narration of his experiences. The English-speaking readership can now enjoy this extravaganza of images and words while having the original poem alongside the translation. The technical difficulties involved in translating a poet who does not use the standard language are clearly highlighted by the translators in their ‘Notes on the present edition and translation’. It is the challenge of translating the specific dialectal expressions and rhymes that stands out in this book. Their decision to use the local linguistic forms of the variety of Northern England mirrors the deliberate bareness of Estellés who refused to conform to the situation of his time.

There is in his poetry a kind of untamed ferocity, perpetually clashing against the existing order of life and culture preached by the Franco regime. These elements at war make the poet intolerant towards the use of established lyrical structures in his poems. He feels the need to use ‘free verse’, and the difficulty of its translation lies in its very nature, as the translators have pointed out. However, Keown and Owen have successfully overcome this challenge by invoking the power of meaning over the word in their translations. The linguistic priority of this poetry undoubtedly rests on the gigantic ambition of using Catalan as a language of choice at a time when its use in any form was considered a political act with deleterious consequences. The authors expose with a sublime touch of verbatim translation not only the socio-political background of the language locally in relation to the politics of the regime but also globally in terms of the use of a minority language. In this sense, the figure of

Estellés is caught between a marginalized ‘periphery’ and an endangered ‘subordinacy’, as the authors highlight: ‘Estellés was a Catalan poet from Valencia whose culture is shrouded in subordinacy’ (2). The translators offer a parallel between the specific lyrics of Estellés and similar processes experienced within the Anglophone world. In order to approach the sense of banishment and criminalisation of a culture they compare the circumstances of Catalan to the Celtic peoples in Britain and Ireland. The complexity of the historical processes in the Iberian Peninsula from medieval times to the present day contextualizes Estellés as part of the history of Valencia and the Catalan language, a language constantly subjected to politics. Not only is the historical context of the language necessary to understand Estellés’ *modus operandi*, but a literary scrutiny of his position and interaction with the poetic tradition is also offered in the book. Using the theoretical configurations of Harold Bloom and T.S. Eliot, particularly his essay ‘Tradition and Individual Talent’, Keown and Owen explore the way in which Estellés evokes Horace, Ovid, Catullus and Virgil to refer to the particularities of Valencian history, and his encounters with Ausiàs March and Garcilaso de la Vega, which serve the purpose of challenging the ideological apparatus of the time.

Although the book lacks a more detailed traditional biography of the author, the translators offer a magnificent and meticulous study of his works with the introductory essays that provide the gateway to the poems. Divided into Horacianes, The Exile of Ovid, After Virgil and Catullus, Ausiàs March and Garcilaso, the English-speaking reader also benefits from the vividness of an introductory text in each section that prepares us to dive into the world of Estellés. This is a vision of extreme detail, an experience that plays out in a form of symbiosis and schizophrenia, as the translators have analyzed, offering the English-speaking readership an immense rhapsody of lyric power, as the last two lines of the collection reveal: ‘I know that, God knows where, you remember me, / for I am

living still, I suddenly awake' (234). The works of Vicent Andrés Estellés have now reached the next stage, a command of the English language, with the reverberations that help the Anglophone mind travel throughout the lands of one of the most important poetic figures of Catalan literature.

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