

ALBERTO LISTA: AN ANGLOPHILE PIONEER IN
SPANISH TRANSLATION

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ABSTRACT

Alberto Lista is a pioneering figure in Spanish literary translation. A multicultural figure of the eighteenth century, he was instrumental in the creation of a literary group in Seville that looked to English literature at a time when the majority of Spanish writers were drawing on French inspiration. A product of the European Enlightenment, his literary legacy includes poems of his own, works translated from other languages as well as versions that were inspired by themes appearing in foreign literature. Lista, educated in the aesthetic doctrines of P. André, Batteux, Marmontel, and Blair, turned to a reflective poetry of carefully-crafted words and sublime rhetoric. The translated poems show us a passionate love of philosophical and cosmopolitan poetry akin to the verses of Meléndez and Cienfuegos. He was the first poet to translate both Milton and Alexander Pope, into Spanish, and at a time when the translation of poetry from foreign sources was seen as essentially a worthless exercise, he and the Sevillian group represent a new beginning in Spanish culture, preparing the way as they did for later writers such as Belmonte Müller and Juan Valera.

KEYWORDS: Translation, English Poetry, Spanish Enlightenment, Multiculturalism, Alberto Lista, Alexander Pope, Elizabeth Carter, John Bowring, Sevillian translators.

RESUMEN

Alberto Lista es una figura pionera en la traducción literaria española. Una persona multicultural del siglo dieciocho, miembro de un grupo literario en Sevilla que tornó su mirada hacia la literatura inglesa en una época en la que la mayoría de los escritores españoles estaban centrándose en la musa francesa. Es un representante de la Ilustración. Su legado literario incluye poemas de realización propia, trabajos traducidos desde otras lenguas así como obras que están inspiradas en literatura foránea. Lista, educado bajo las doctrinas estéticas de André, Batteux, Marmontel y Blair se dedicó a una poesía de factura cuidada y de retórica sublime. Los poemas traducidos muestran su predilección por la

poesía filosófica y cosmopolita similar a la de Meléndez y Cienfuegos. Le corresponde un lugar pionero por haber traducido tanto a Milton como a Alexander Pope al español, cuando la traducción de poesía de latitudes extranjeras se consideraba como un ejercicio infructuoso. Lista y el grupo hispalense representan un nuevo amanecer en la cultura española y allanan el camino para escritores venideros tales como Belmonte Müller o Juan Valera.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Traducción, Poesía Inglesa, Ilustración Española, Multiculturalismo, Alberto Lista, Alexander Pope, Elizabeth Carter, John Bowring, Traductores Sevillanos.

1. INTRODUCCIÓN

Alberto Lista is a pioneering figure in Spanish literary translation. A multicultural figure of the eighteenth century, he was instrumental in the creation of a literary group in Seville that looked to English literature at a time when the majority of Spanish writers were drawing on French inspiration. A product of the European Enlightenment, his literary legacy includes poems of his own, works translated from other languages as well as versions that were inspired by themes appearing in foreign literature, such as the verses on “Lost Innocence”, which, whilst clearly inspired by Milton, cannot be traced to an original text.¹ This sample clearly shows us the relationship between and boundary separating the original and the translation, the latter being more or less indirect. Lista was the first Spanish poet to translate Milton and Alexander Pope. At a time when the translation of poetry from foreign sources was seen as essentially a worthless exercise, he and the Sevillian group represent a new beginning in Spanish culture, preparing the way as they did for later writers such as Belmonte Müller and Juan Valera.

With respect to the translations which Lista completed from English, we can identify five blocks of verse. This choice of texts displays Lista’s philosophical and rhetorical education as well as the multicultural nature of his influences. The first is the longest: his version of Alexander Pope’s *The Dunciad*, which was composed by in 1728-1729, and given its definitive form in 1742 (*The New Dunciad*). Secondly, we examine a short series of verses translated from Richardson’s novel *Clarissa*. The third series of verses are translations of the Russian poems which the Hispanist John Bowring had translated into English in his 1820 poetry collection, entitled *Specimens of the Russian Poets*. Another sequence of verses which Lista translated from English appeared in its

¹ Interested readers may consult our article published in *Alfinge. Revista de Filología* (Philological Magazine), Number 20, 2008: 151-170.

target version with the title “*El respeto*” (“Respect”). Finally, an English sonnet which Lista translated from his friend and companion Blanco White will be examined.

2. *THE DUNCIAD*: SPANISH TRANSLATION BY ALBERTO LISTA

Alexander Pope (1688-1744), the great master of Augustan poetry used his literary pulpit, to lash out at corruption in politics, as personified by Prime Minister Robert Walpole. A theoretical assessment of English literature during this period is offered by Pope in his work *An Essay on Criticism* (1711). A close reading of *The Dunciad*, reveals that Pope’s aesthetic notions were based on the principles of Nature, Rules and Wit, and makes it clear that balance and restraint govern all which he writes.

In his 1733 poem *An Essay on Man* Pope revealed his full acceptance of the hierarchy that encompassed Divine providence, angels, man and animals. His was a static conception based on “The Great Chain of Being” which concurred with 18th-Century philosophy: “man’s as perfect as he ought; / His Knowledge measured to his state and place;/ His time a moment, and a point his space”.

Pope’s satires feature a moral aim and are of a decidedly didactic bent. Among his epistles, four written between 1731 and 1735, “Moral Essays”, stand out, centering on the evolution of English society at a time when the throne had passed from Queen Anne (the daughter of James II, who left no successor) to the House of Hanover, under George I. In 1714 he submitted his satire against the refined and elegant world at court through his work *The Rape of the Lock*, and in 1728 he published the first version of the work which Alberto Lista would translate six decades later. *The Dunciad* attacks literary mediocrity and the plethora of so-called modern writers who were proliferating at the time.

In 1728 Alexander Pope submitted *The Dunciad* for printing for the first time. The work was first divided into three books, but the following year the author would add a fourth. In 1742 the presses churned out *The New Dunciad*. The following year Pope reedited and had the definitive text printed, ultimately published as three books.

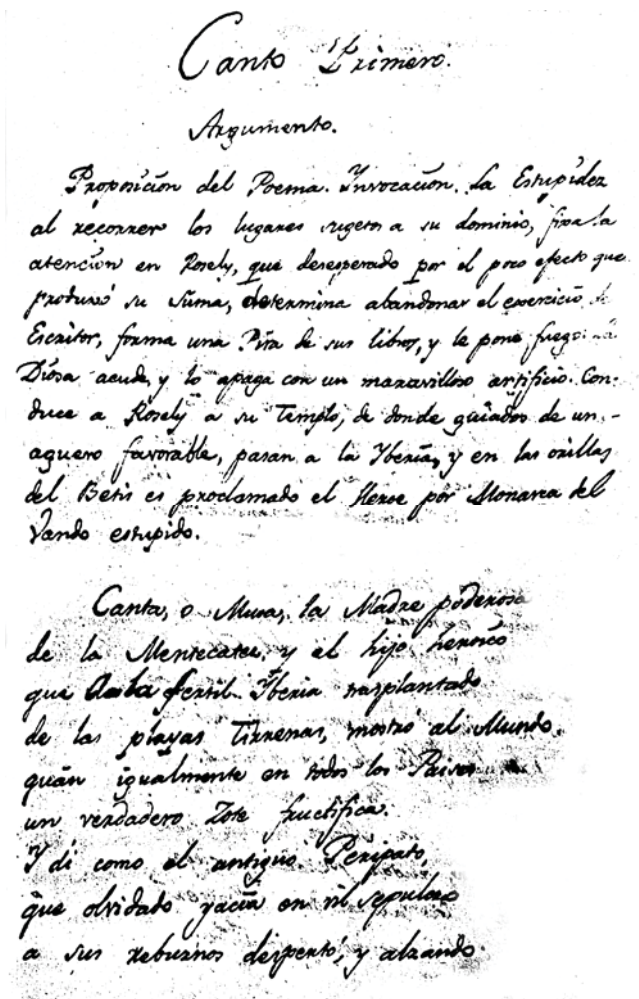
Alberto Lista, can be seen as a pioneering figure and a cultural intermediary, and this role became evident through his work as a translator. On July 22, 1798 the young Spaniard read the verses of his translation at Seville’s Academy of Human Letters. Lista’s work is entitled *El imperio de la estupidez* (*The Empire of Stupidity*) and would remain unpublished until Leopoldo Augusto de Cueto inserted it in the third volume of *Poetas líricos del siglo XVIII* (*18th-Century Lyrical Poets*).

Alexander Pope's original work, is divided into four books. Alberto Lista translated the complete poem into Spanish, the target text thus being distributed in four books, to which the translator opted to apply the term "cantos."

The Sevillian poet, however, transformed certain details and information present in the source text. The symmetry which can be noted in the morphology of the translated work when compared to the original work also included the introduction which Pope placed at the start of each one of his books. The fact that Lista maintained the structure of the text upon which his translation was based indicates his insistence upon conserving the original's structure. The external structure of the source text is thus maintained in the Spanish version. The blocks of the source text and the target text are the following:

- *The Dunciad*, which is the title, is translated as *El imperio de la estupidez* (*The Empire of Stupidity*).
- Alberto Lista opens his work with a lengthy "Translator's Prologue" to which we shall refer below.
- The first block in the original text starts off with this title "Argument to Book the First" and after some almost twenty lines in prose as an introduction, the original continues with the verses of this first canto, which total 330. Lista begins his work with "*Primer canto, Argumento*" ("First Canto, Argument") and, just like Pope, after setting forth the argument he continues with the translation of the verses.
- The second segment of the original begins with "Book the Second. Argument." After an initial section in prose, the verses follow. The translator proceeds in the same fashion as before, titling his work "*Segundo canto, Argumento*" ("Second Canto, Argument.") He then switches to verse and continues with the poem.
- Cueto, the editor, preceded the "*Canto tercero*" ("Third Canto") with the subheading "*Argumento*" ("Argument"), before the prose introduction. Lista, in contrast, according to the manuscript, in this canto and in the following only employs the titles "*Canto tercero*" ("Third Canto") and "*Canto cuarto*" ("Fourth Canto"), omitting the second noun ("Argument") which was translated in the first and second cantos. The brevity of his prose introduction also stands out, as the original is three times longer.
- Finally, Alexander Pope's text presents the last book, "Book the Fourth, Argument," with its corresponding introduction and its respective verses following. The translator once again abbreviates the prose introduction ("*Canto Cuarto*" or "Fourth Canto") and again omits the other part of the title, "*Argumento*." The verses appear right away, just as occurs in the original poem.

We include here a fragment from the original manuscript taken from the beginning of the translation in which one can see, written in Lista's hand, the summarized version of the argument, along with the nine lines opening the first canto.



The lines translated by Alberto Lista from *The Dunciad* represent the vast majority of his translation work, and the distinction between the translation and original version is more evident here than in any other work, as Lista's version features the same intentionality and the same essence, but with different content in a different form. Let us take a look, part by part.

The poem's epic component and thematic aim is captured by the translator, who in his "Prólogo" ("Prologue") explains that the work is clearly a satire, in the following words:

Alexander Pope, the celebrated English poet who achieved fame early in this century, wrote the poem *The Dunciad*, directed at the bad writers of his era, with whom he was always in perpetual conflict, a baleful fate which all the great geniuses have suffered over the ages, and which in our era one of Spain's most accomplished writers experienced, whose name shall suffice for posterity to honor him. This poem is a genuine satire, and the epic genre only serves as a mysterious veil which conceals the characters somewhat, in order to give the reader the pleasure of recognizing them and a way to be able to take credit for the work and merit of having discovered them. Thus, even when it seems to lack a well-ordered plan, story lines which are followed out, a well-designed plot, and actions of proper durations, it should be noted that the absence of these virtues, typical of the epic, should not diminish the merit of a poem which is ultimately a satire. (Lista, 1953: 378)

While its faithfulness in its external structure has already been pointed out, in terms of its internal structure there is less symmetry to be found, although the central fact of the hero's stupidity remains intact. While Alexander Pope's hero is Colley Cibber, Lista turns to a Frenchman who was well-known at the time through the Spanish press: Count Roselly de Lorgues. The poem's length is another defect which is conspicuous when the texts are compared, as the source text includes 1754 lines, while the target text contains 43 fewer. In addition, Pope's lines are longer, as can be noted from the start:

The Mighty Mother, and her Son who brings
 The Smithfield Muses to the ear of Kings,
 I sing. Say you, her instruments the Great!
 Call'd to this work by Dullness, Jove, and Fate;
 You by whose care, in vain decry'd and curst,
 Still Dunces the second reigns like Dunces the first;

*Canta, oh Musa, la madre ponderosa
 de la mentecatez, el hijo heroico
 que, a la fértil Iberia trasplantado
 de las playas tirrenas, mostró al mundo
 cuán igualmente en todos los países
 un verdadero zote fructifica.*

A contextual analysis of these six lines reveals other enlightening points with respect to the changes introduced by the "translator." We can see two

examples. The nominal phrase in the second verse “The Smithfield Muses” refers to Bartholomew Fair a place of dreadful entertainments, which though popular with some contemporaries were detested by Pope and consequently presented ironically. In the sixth line when he writes “Still Dunces the second reigns like Dunces the first” he is poking fun at the reigns of George I and George II. Alberto Lista does not capture the idea of censure here by applying it to Spanish politics, as among the immediate consequences of such criticism would be a quick refusal to publish the poem.

Alberto Lista, moreover, spurned the popular tone and prosaic style which had come to mark the new literature of the age. In fact, in his *Imperio de la estupidez* he includes and attacks the Spanish writers Lobo, Montoro, León Marchante, Trigueros and Iriarte, key proponents of this modern style. In so doing, he replaces a list of names from the target text, including Curll and Lintot, and the poets Lauren Eusden, Tate, Theobald, Heywood, Dennis, John Ogilly, Ridpath, and Nathaniel Mist. Despite being acclaimed poets, few Spaniards of the age would have recognized their names. Perhaps following this reasoning, Lista replaced them with the aforementioned names, in addition to Valladares, Hugo Imparcial, Comella, Gutiérrez and Zavala.

The translator’s intention in making this change is understandable. However, his substitution of another more universal name, that of Cervantes (in line 21), along with those of Rabelais, Swift, Fletcher, Shakespeare, and Moliere, who are supplanted by Fileno (Reinoso), Herrera, Góngora, Newton, Goudin, Moratín and Meléndez is more puzzling. In this case the young writer’s desire to insert poets from his own nation leads him to erase names which would be as easily recognized by educated readers of the translation.

The philosophy of literature or the science of fine arts is expected to imitate and beautify literary works. Lista felt free to adapt and change the content because by doing so, he believed that he was embellishing the final product. Lista used this theoretical justification as he adapted the poem to Spain’s social reality and tried to connect with the readers of his own country. Lista did not take the same path of social vindictiveness which Pope displayed in the “Scriblerus Club.” Pope, at the start, takes aim at his literary rivals, but the poem’s universal message is undermined by the banality of its language. Pope’s great literary achievement, in our view, was to free English letters from superficiality, and the translator’s intentions were fully consonant with this legacy.

Both Pope and Lista were concerned with the literary situation in their countries. If in England bad writers abounded, in Spain too many writers were guilty of great excess, while the country was also full of bad translators. This is one of the ideas which would define Alberto Lista’s ideology and, possibly, what led him to carry out the aforementioned changes, allowing him to maintain the same intentionality as in Pope, the same essence, even the same

external structure, but with content that was completely different from that of the source text.

3. A POEM BY RICHARDSON

If Alexander Pope is remembered as the standard-bearer of English Augustan poetry, Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) stands as the champion of the English novel. In 1740 he published *Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded*. Seven years later would come the publication of *Clarissa: Or, The History of a Young Lady*. Richardson would fully develop the epistolary genre, which had appeared in 1579 in John Lyly's *Eupheus*, and in Spain would be introduced by Juan Valera in his *Pepita Jiménez*. It is an ideal literary modality to display the human being in all his profundity, more potent than mere dialogue or simple narration.

Samuel Richardson's three novels were obviously written in prose. In an epistolary style, the works at times feature references to other authors or periods peculiar to English history and culture. Richardson lacked knowledge of other cultures and languages², so he turned to his own culture to enrich his texts, including poems from writers such as Shakespeare, Dryden and Milton. The poem most relevant to this article is "Ode to Wisdom," written by Elizabeth Carter (1808:64) and which served as the inspiration for Richardson, who inserted it into the core of his novel *Clarissa*. Carter was an enlightened writer, the epitome of the kind of erudite woman her age celebrated, forming part of the cultural society known as the "Bluestocking Circle." (Sherburn & Bond, 1967: 1051-1071).

Clarissa Harlowe, a sensitive and delicate young lady, is the heroine of the novel *Clarissa; Or, The History of a Young Lady*. The protagonist's family arranges for her a marriage of convenience to bolster the family's estate. Clarissa feels wronged and humiliated by her impending matrimony, orchestrated as a mere transaction, and voices her anguish in the ode which she composes and which underlies the pages of the novel. If the epistles allow the reader access to the character's inner world, the writing of a poem also portrays the thoughts and feelings of its author. It is a way of manifesting and giving form to the character's introspection. The main character, upon drafting the poem in question, sends it to her friend Anna Howe, who responds referring to "that charming 'Ode to Wisdom', which does honour to our sex." It is a moral teaching conveyed not only by the poem *per se*, in opposition to the family's pecuniary plot, but also by the response and interpretation of her friend, a faithful companion at the time.

² Alcalá Galiano, who preferred "Clarissa" to "Pamela," described Richardson as a "man unversed in languages" (1862,3:8). (Moreno Hurtado, 2003:154).

Richardson's novels become showcases for the display of morality and virtue. This is the greatest appeal which Lista found in the stories, as the Sevillian actually deplored the novel; as a fledgling genre in his view it lacked a definitive mold. (Juretschke, 1951: 266). Alberto Lista repudiated Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse* for its excessive theory, though he was attracted to the works of Fielding and Richardson, preferring the works of the English for their sentimental, didactic and virtuous tone. In this regard the Spanish writer recommended the use of such novels as a constant and powerful means of influencing youth, and underscored the advisability of including moral guidance in which the passions were approached with some reserve, signaling their dangerous rather than their lighter side. Lista cautioned also against an idealized exaggeration of the world and of man. This moral and rhetorical doctrine is precisely that which flourishes in the series of verses which the Sevillian translated from Richardson's novel, which he entitled "*A la sabiduría*" ("To Wisdom") and which began: (Lista, 1953: 306):

*Ya el ave de la noche
deja el oscuro albergue,
donde esquivó el día
la lumbre refulgente;
y en tanto que las horas
beleño al mundo vierten,
entre las densas nieblas
sus negras alas tiende.*

The noun phrases Lista chooses at the beginning of the poem, such as "night", "dark shelter", "expiring of the day", "flaming fire", "thick fog" and "black wings" convey the original atmosphere of light and darkness.

4. THE RUSSIAN POEMS OF JOHN BOWRING

Another English writer whose poetry Lista would translate was John Bowring. This poet was born in Exeter into a Puritan family. As well as being a Hispanophile, he had a great interest in foreign literatures, particularly those of Eastern Europe, and his tutelage under and friendship with Jeremy Bentham is also noteworthy. One of the first examples of his cosmopolitanism appeared between 1821 and 1823 in the work *Specimens of the Russian Poets*, which would be followed by *Batavian Anthology* (1824), *Ancient Poetry and Romances of Spain* (1827), and *Serbian Popular Poetry* (1827).

As a journalist, Bowring became the editor of the *Westminster Review* in 1825, in which publication he transmitted his political/economic theories,

which anticipated the free commerce doctrines later to be endorsed by Richard Cobden and John Bright. His ideology was marked by its call for parliamentary reform and his support for public education for the masses. In fact, when he joined the government as an MP he headed up a commission on foreign commerce in France, Italy, Syria and Germany. With a truly all-encompassing mind, he was also responsible for the publishing of mathematical works including *The Decimal System in Numbers, Coins and Accounts* (1854). His trips abroad included a stay in China during the middle of the century and service as the governor of Hong Kong in which, among other praiseworthy achievements, he managed to reduce the slave trade.

In addition to this active and eventful life of public service which culminated with his service as a Minister Plenipotentiary in Italy (1861), where he negotiated with Belgium and Spain, he was also a member of the “Royal Society” and the “Royal Geographic Society.” John Bowring visited Spain on various occasions, above all during the War of Independence.

His literary works, which were a product of this cosmopolitan existence, included *The Kingdom and People of Siam* (1857) and *Translations from Hungarian poet Alexander Petofi* (1866), though it was *Specimens of the Russian Poets* which served as the source text which Alberto Lista read and published in Spanish through its selective translation. In addition to their ideological affinities, both poets shared a common background. They both came from trading families, the Englishman being the son of wool merchants and Lista came from a commercial background as well.

Alberto Lista entitled his work *Piezas escogidas de los poetas rusos, traducidas al inglés, por el Señor Juan Bowring* (*Pieces chosen from Russian poets, translated into English by Mr. John Bowring*) and subheaded it “*Traducción del inglés – Varios fragmentos*” (“*Translation from the English – Various Fragments*”). The verses which Lista chose come from two different fragments, the first containing 17 lines of mythological content, and the second with 116 lines marked by their Christian elements and the theme of God’s creation. They begin thus: (Lista, 1953: 369):

*¡Oh tú, eternal unidad, cuya presencia
llena el espacio, el movimiento rige,
brilla inmutable sobre el raudo vuelo
del tiempo asolador! ¡Dios sin segundo,
sobre todo ser, único y trino!*

It is interesting that Lista was translating Russian poetry by way of an English translation, into Spanish. It demonstrates the truly cosmopolitan circles in which these writers were operating.

5. “EL RESPETO” (“RESPECT”), ANOTHER TRANSLATION FROM ENGLISH POETRY

Another series of verses translated from English language which we have found among the poems of Alberto Lista is a sequence of 48 lines with the subheading “*Traducción del inglés*” (“Translation from English”). Cueto (1953:339), the compiler of the volume containing Lista’s poetry, included these fifty some lines among his romances, after works such as “*El despecho*” (“Spite”) and “*El temor de la mudanza*” (“The Fear of Change”) and preceding poems on the same subject, which are “*La historia de amor*” (“The Story of Love”) or “*El desengaño inútil*” (“Useless Disillusion”). The translation in question entitled “*El respeto*,” begins as follows:

*Corazón, guarda tu llama
en lo más hondo del pecho;
no advierta la bella Elisa
ni aún el humo de su incendio.
En vano es el llanto; en vano
ardientes suspiros tiernos;
¿de qué te sirve la queja,
si es imposible el remedio?*

The poem which Lista translated opens the reflective mind to a climactic moment of innermost being and profound introspection. The lyrical subject – which could well be the translator’s alter ego – does not waver before the beautiful Elisa. His heart burns and he weeps for her, capturing her beauty and her image in his memory. The text conveys the protagonist’s fervent desire and passion, concealed in the furthest corners of his spirit.

If this is not a corresponded passion the poem does not confirm this, as the subject addresses his heart, exhorting it to contain his passionate love deep within. But in light of the tale the poem tells, this effort is in vain. He is denied his “adored object,” and is destined to suffer with his “desire,” having to follow “the strict code of silence.” Along these lines, the poem weaves the story of an impossible love which enslaves and kills its protagonist, who is unable to voice his sentiments.

The poem presents the introspective ruminations of the lyrical subject, a meditative poetry which affording an insightful glimpse into the character’s soul. It is worth considering mind that Alberto Lista’s library included works from Thompson and Young, whose verses were based on the internal observation of the soul, and whose poetry was born of introspection. Both *Night Thoughts* (1742) and *The Universal Passion* – books by Young – reveal these

features. The great 18th-century English critic Samuel Johnson explained about Young that his verses were immediately famous and translated into other languages, but would soon disappear and be forgotten. This abandonment was typical of the poetry which came to be known as “The Graveyard School,” whose themes and semantic orientation would grant it this name.

6. A SONNET BY BLANCO WHITE

Blanco Crespo, a colleague of Lista’s in Seville, later in life would change his language, religion and country. Jose María Blanco was a Spaniard self-exiled on the British Isles. On February 23, 1810 he departed for Britain, where he duplicated his name, dubbing himself “Blanco-White.” The protean force which Blanco’s writing in London emanates was evident in the “Letter” which he wrote to the publishers of *Varietades*, this being “one of the best pieces of criticism of the Sevillian school.” (Menéndez Pelayo, 1948, III, 447). This work announced the vigorous talent, of Blanco White, a talent which he would display while in London. One of the poems which he composed during his stay in England was that which Lista translated and inserted in the series of sonnets catalogued under the number “XXXIX.” It was Blanco’s best-known sonnet, of which the author penned four different versions. The first version dates from 1825 and its manuscript can be found in Oxford³. Another manuscript is dated from 1838⁴. The third version of the sonnet is the guide Lista had for his translation which, although it bears no date, cannot be from later than 1837, because Lista translated it into Spanish in 1838⁵. The author would send the fourth version⁶ of the sonnet to the provost of Oriel’s wife⁷.

Lista translated Blanco White’s sonnet into Spanish with a philosophical, teleological and meditative tone. Its style is descriptive and the

³ “Quarto Commonplace Book,” 1824, dated in Ufton, 19 December, 1825.

⁴ This is contained in “Life,” III, p. 47 and includes the following note: “Upon copying my sonnet on The Night and Death for a friend I made some corrections, so that it now reads thus: (...)”

⁵ The original is located in Santander’s Menéndez Pelayo Library in an envelope in which Marcelino wrote: “A most beautiful version of Blanco White’s English sonnet.” It is published in the article by M. Artigas “The Sonnet ‘Night and Death’ by Blanco White, page 350.

⁶ A fifth version of the sonnet is included in “Complete Poetic Works” (Garnica & Díaz (Pub.), 1994: 351-352). All of the information we have been able to collect indicates that, as the publishers explain, this was an apocryphal version. Said indications appear right from the apocryphal dedicatory note to Coleridge, as – although it is a manuscript – the vocabulary differs from that employed by Blanco.

⁷ This, said fourth manuscript version of Blanco’s sonnet, is located in Oriel College’s Library, “Oriel Correspondence” Num. 125. As indicated, it is that which the Sevillian sent to Mrs. Hawkins.

theme must have captivated the translator, perhaps due to the inner light irradiated by the purity of the subject. The poem deals with darkness before the creation as new worlds are illuminated and revealed. It describes the awe which Adam feels upon beholding the night. The plot evokes, ever so subtly, the theme of the Fall, accompanied by a luminosity which veils and deceives. Finally the poet describes, in a reflective tone, the fear which man feels before death, and presents the deception of light and of life, proclaiming, thematically, the authenticity of heaven, the “castle of golden sapphire.”

7. CONCLUSIONS

The selection of poems which Lista translated reveals a writer imbued with a classical spirit who directed his gaze upon the verses of Alexander Pope, the champion of English Augustan poetry; the didactic novels of Richardson, a pioneer of prose written to entertain and to morally instruct; certain sonnets of biblical inspiration and theological reflections from the foreign pen of his friend Blanco White.

Lista, educated in the aesthetic doctrines of P. André, Batteux, Marmontel, and Blair, turned to a reflective poetry of carefully-crafted words and sublime rhetoric. The translated poems show us a passionate love of philosophical and cosmopolitan poetry akin to the verses of Meléndez and Cienfuegos.

The poetry translated from English reveals to us an astute, free-flowing, even ebullient interpreter who flirts with Pope’s verses, injecting in them with the names of minor writers close to him and well-known in the circles where the translations would be read. It also contains an instructive and classical dimension born of an exceptional eruditeness and an admiration for and willingness to emulate verse in other languages.

These translations are along the same lines as the poetry which the author wrote directly in his mother tongue: profane lyrical poetry such as “*A Baco*” (“To Bacchus”) or “*A la juventud estudiosa de Cádiz*” (“To the Studious Youth of Cádiz”); philosophical poetry such as “*La inocencia perdida*” (“Innocence Lost”), “*La bondad natural del hombre*” (“Man’s Natural Goodness”), or “*La vida humana*” (“Human Life”); religious poetry like “*La natividad de nuestra señora*” (“Our Lady’s Nativity”), “*La muerte de Jesús*” (“The Death of Jesus”), “*La resurrección de nuestro señor*” (“The Resurrection of our Lord”); and sonnets such as “*La belleza*” (“Beauty”) or “*La noche*” (“The Night”).

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