

'NINE TIMES THE SPACE':  
FROM TRANSLATOR'S NOTES TO MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*<sup>1</sup>

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Understanding the original meaning in the original context forms the basis of any translation. Translating poetry, however, requires an understanding which goes some way beyond the formal requirements of intelligent reading and informed interpretation. There are mental processes in any reading which are not easy to define in cognitive terms. Reading poetry, however, is by definition an aesthetic process, having a lot in common with our listening of music or looking at a work of art, where our cognitive functions are trained to be neither the exclusive interpreter of the subject nor the supreme selector of thought. Now, there are perhaps passages in Lacan or Nietzsche or Marx which can be enjoyed in synaesthetic terms as well as there are lines and sometimes whole paragraphs in *Paradise Lost* where little or no visual or musical perceptions are required beyond those usually attached to any piece of theological meandering. But our perception of them is predetermined by the specific difference, inherent in the text, which relates not only to the difference of style, but also to the difference in our reading of them.

It has been said that when reading poetry, each of us is turned into a kind of poet, but let me add, not necessarily into a poet of miltonic kind. Rather, we become *aisthetes*, those who perceive in order to enjoy; but that does not mean that in order to enjoy it more we are at once ready to close our critical eye to it. And neither can we enjoy it by our critical eye only. What we do is *aisthenomai*, we are to see in order to perceive. It is, however, clear that we cannot see in the dark. We need an illumination or rather, the object itself must be put before us in such a way as not to defy the preconditions of our perception of it. It is interesting to note that this is precisely the thing Milton turns to his Muse to grant him in his opening Invocation. He prays for illumination of his path before embarking on his epic flight. From the very beginning he perceives his poetical task in terms of a journey, much like Chaucer or Dante, and he makes the concept of light the supreme vehicle and the final goal of it. For him the Light stands for Truth; for only in the light of truth are the things visible for what they are.<sup>2</sup>

1 from: M. Strojan, 'Nine Times the Space, Translating Milton, Translating Sense'.

2 Milton's most characteristic reaffirmation of the above principle in P.L. is to be found in the famous Invocation 'Hail holy Light', III., 1-6, defining the Light as the "bright effluence of bright essence increate", 'essence' here meaning *the true nature of things* (see: *John Milton, Paradise Lost, Books iii-iv*, ed. by Lois Potter and John Broadbent, Cambridge, 1976. p. 48.) The chief biblical reference for the passage is, ofcourse, John's "God is the light" (1Jh,5) but it should be remembered that in the writings of Alexandrian fathers as well as in many of the neoplatonists, e.g. in Milton's coeval at Christ's College, Cambridge, Henry More, Light is the particular symbol of Logos and (therefore) of Truth. C.f.

Taken formally, the miltonic thought-structures are clearly not mimetic in the obvious sense of the word. They seem to be paradigmatic in the sense that they do not seem to apply to anything within our immediate range of experience. They put to us, in a form of reported speech, in a *mythos*, a world of rebellious armies falling from the sky and of angels conversant with the humans. They are not, as the Germans would have it, a *Satzwahrheit* in relation to a *Sachwahrheit*; neither are they, in the strict miltonic sense, a *thing invented*. They are created by the poet who was himself conversant with the Muse and therefore divinely inspired. Aryan or no Aryan, as a Christian poet he would have had his Muse dictate him lines which would in no way stand up against the faith of his equals or his own, against the truth. He would have her reveal the drama of the Christian Truth as *adequatio intellectus humani ad rem creatam* so that his own invention would ipso facto stand as a human testimony to a divine revelation of the Bible.

Milton's position in relation to the traditional mythopoetic truth is quite clear from The Nativity Ode onwards. Whereas the tradition concerned itself with the parades of fallen gods and obsolete heroes, his explicit aim in *Paradise Lost* was to present us in an epic form with the *synthesis* of the divine plan of salvation, i.e. a sort of poetic history of Grace with The Complete Works of Milton (or at least the latter part of them) historically included. They are *adequatio of ens creatum* and *intellectus divinus*, which means that both sides of the miltonic equation of *veritas* seem to be intellectual rather than realistic. This means that Milton's thought-structures are in themselves conventional in the sense that they are, by the authority of the Muse, in *convenientia* with the Creation and are therefore, by the grace of the poet, paradigmatic of it. As such they can be comprehended in their abstract form, in the form of their topicality, which brings us somewhat closer to the next step in translating sense, translating of the obvious sense.

### Difficulties of the 'obvious sense'; an example of a 'thought-structure'.

There are difficulties in Milton which are for all to see and can be studied in the libraries of criticism. His theology, anthropology, astronomy, psychology, mythology and ritual - the whole range of episteme - are all difficult subjects of Miltonic studies. Milton did not pretend, writes MacCaffrey,<sup>3</sup> that understanding is anything but hard and rare; or, as one of his contemporaries wrote, we cannot have the glory without the hardship: "For all noble things are difficult as they are rare."<sup>4</sup> But some are difficult even without being rare. Below the layers of conscious ideas lay, imbedded in words and phrases, the concepts which might seem self-explanatory when read, but which for various reasons defy translation. Some such may mirror the cultural differences in application of a language to a specific subject (or the whole cluster of them). Some may, for the sake of clarity, require a verbatim translation which would stand out in a foreign context and so give raise to objections made on aesthetic or purely poetic grounds. Surely, the limitations of one's language play an important role in translator's choice of words; but so do the limitations of thought. Where the two combine we may end up in a maze of versified footnotes in lieu of lines with the transparency of the

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Hunter, Patrides, Adamson, *Bright Essence, Studies in Milton's Theology*, UUP, Salt Lake City, 1973, pp. 55-57 et passim.

<sup>3</sup> Isabel Gamble MacCaffrey, *Paradise Lost as a Myth*, Cambridge, Mass., 1959; p. 214.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

original text completely lost from the translation. Here is what Milton says of the physical condition of his hero after he was hurled headlong to bottomless perdition in the fiery lake:

Nine times the space that measures day and night  
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew  
Lay vanquished...

(P.L., I, 50)

For reasons I need not go into right now this will not do in my language. One cannot use *space* in this context without seeming punctilious in matters of computation or outright poetically silly. In Slovene you can simply say nine days and nights, or, to be on the safe side, nine times the time that measures etc.

But none of these I'm afraid is the translation of Milton's line. When we measure something we either do it by applying a predetermined fraction of the thing to the whole, or we can measure it by something else completely, which is what we do, when we measure the lapse of time between two events by means of earth's rotation. Diurnal cycle is therefore a measure of temporal continuity, but here it can also stand as the metaphor for the space as an interval between two points with the reference to the actual distance, the depth of Satan's fall, as it is reflected in the length i.e. the depth of his sleep. Is this then what I should call a mixed metaphor, or is it an ordinary, poetically embellished statement of a physiological (literary) fact? Does Milton use it as a detail of a grand style in his fictional narrative or is it construed as a purposeful poetical figure as are Wordsworth's *spots of time* in *The Prelude*?<sup>5</sup> What is the structure of thought behind it? Or rather, to which structure of thought in *space-time* relationship does Milton normally adhere to when caught unawares, and what does he do to it when fully occupied about his business?

It is not for me to go into depths here; I am sure there is everything you'll ever want to know about the subject stacked somewhere in the libraries, so let me just point out a couple of passages which are, I hope, relevant for a translator to work with.

### Shakespeare and Milton; paradigmatic and mythopoetic structures

I always thought Satan was a bit like Shakespeare's Richard III., his peer in the ambitions and executions of power game, his rival in malice and his fellow traveller on the ways of evil. What they say was the earliest piece of *Paradise Lost*, Satan's words to the Sun in Book IV. (ll. 32-114), may be with some accommodation as to the rank and status turned into a grand aside of Richard's without many people noticing the absurdity of intrusion. And yet, it may not be. Fascinating as they both are, there is a world of difference in stature between the two. One is majestic and manly in his demeanour, while the other ( in some productions ) stalks around on crouches; both in a way are self-made men or rather self-created monsters, yet the latter is an epitome of heroism in his standing up against all odds to his supreme Commander, while the

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<sup>5</sup> *The Prelude*, Book xii, ll. 208 et passim: '*There are in our existence spots of time...*'; the most important conceptual image in the poem, where *spots of time* are also what might be termed *moments of space*. Their function is to enshrine '*the spirit of the Past for future restoration*' (see ll. 285-286, and also: H. Bloom's footnote to the l. 208 in *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2., OUP, 1973, p. 223)

The above line is, significantly, also untranslatable into Slovenian (for the similar reasons as given above).

former *is* the Commander in Chief everybody rebels against at the end. One is an English King and the other is the Prince of Hell's Angels, the first of his kind. They are both haters of the sun, reaching towards us from the dark - their true habitation: the Prince of Darkness himself and the dark man who was made king on the eclipse of the sun of York. Both are great perverters of law and order, even of justice and decency itself: whatever they touch turns into a lie, a crime or an abomination. Yet Satan acts prompted by revenge, he has a plan while Richard has none. Thrust for power is his only plan and prompter and he acts accordingly. After achieving the crown and sceptre he has no idea what to do with them. He is like so many political leaders when coming into office: they trust no one, yet they leave their day to day running of the country to their secretaries of state. Satan on the other hand is, in that sense, above politics, as high above as an angel ought to be, I suppose. He is primarily a general, a prince relying on his men and in the end doing everything himself. Yet he is also a bit like a snail. Wherever he goes he is in the habit of taking his house with him and leaving his trail behind, and he knows it:

Me miserable! which way shall I fly  
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?  
Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell;  
And in the lowest deep a lower deep  
Still threat'ning to devour me opens wide,  
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.

(IV, 73-78)

King Richard's oration when he starts out of his sleep after the ghost of Buckingham has just left him leaves us in no doubt what *he* is:

...What! do I fear myself? there's no else by:  
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.  
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.  
Then fly: what! from myself? Great reason why:  
Lest I revenge myself upon myself!  
Alack! I love myself. Wherefore? for any good  
That I myself have done unto myself  
For hateful deeds committed by myself?

(V, iii, 183- 190)

What they are both saying is that one cannot fly from oneself; but Richard, while reserving his better judgement from his character, is quite sensibly identifying his lot with himself only, while Satan identifies himself with the whole lot of Hell. Apart from being an individual, Satan is also *a place*.

Richard's hell lies in his self-love, and in the even deeper loneliness of the man who has no pity for himself:

I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;  
Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself  
Find in myself no pity to myself?

(*ibid.*, 200-202)

It is as if for Richard, most of this world's vocabulary was contained in the word "myself". It appears in the end that the only tangible thing there is in this world to possess is love, or charity as the Bible has it. If I have none, I can relate to no one but myself; and then, if I have no self-pity (and here this word becomes the crisis word),

I can't even relate to myself, for the only thing felt for a man no creature but himself can love, is pity.

Satan's hell is of another order altogether. It lacks any of the King's human proportions. Glorified to the last by most of his host, he is, as a result of the defeat in his self-created office, tormented by self-pity, an inverted form of Narcissism we are told, whereof his inner self takes in the forms of the outer Hell, making him the infernal condition personified. He identifies with his office of Evil and his house of Darkness Visible.

There are several hells pictured in *Paradise Lost*, as there are several heavenly places, but the subjective one which has captured the Spirit's immortal mind is the cruellest of them all. Unlike Richard's dream-hell where his guilty conscience is paid a visit by a procession of ghosts of his murderous past, Satan's own version grows out of his initial sin of pride, hurt by defeat and spurred on by vain thoughts of revenge to overcome his fallen state. Unlike the self-confessed villain King, who is loved by himself only and keeps no true allegiance with others since he has no other course than himself to identify with, Satan thinks himself fully responsible for his allies in crime if not entirely for the calamity they found themselves in. His host are as much the instrument of his ambition as any general's troops ought to be. But lying vanquished on fiery lakes or trying to quench their infernal thirst by the ever denying rivers of hell the devils are also the living picture of Satan's own defeat. So he'd better get them back into shape if his own shape is ever to be improved upon. Beyond this he has cut himself from all choice: he is to go on, ever to do evil, never to do good and, if at all possible, to turn this awful philosophy into the means of achieving his own good. For now his prime motivation is hatred, and his end goal, the Alpha and Omega of all satanic epic - his restoration to heavenly bliss.

...Where there is no good  
For which to strive, no strife can grow up there  
From faction; for none sure will claim in hell  
Precedence, none, whose portion is so small  
Of present pain, that with ambitious mind  
Will covet more. With this advantage then  
...we now return  
To claim our just inheritance of old,  
Surer to prosper than prosperity  
Could have assured us... (II, 30-40)

Cut out from all happiness and being the ultimate sufferer in defeat, Satan, unlike Richard, is not afraid of rivalry. His is no shaky crown in need of ruthless protection. And he is not in need of a horse either. He knows he won't escape, and he can't die and go to hell. He is already there, and alive. Yet as far as heaven is concerned, he is as good as dead.

...is there no place  
Left for repentance, none for pardon left?  
None left but by submission; and that word  
Disdain forbids me, and my dread of shame  
Among the spirits beneath, whom I seduced  
With other promises and other vaunts  
Than to submit, boasting I could subdue  
The Omnipotent. Ay me, little they know  
How dearly I abide that boast so vain,

Under what torments inwardly I groan:  
While they adore me on the throne of hell,  
With diadem and sceptre high advanced  
The lower still I fall...

(IV, 86- 91)

Yet there is a bottom to his fall. It comes at once with the realisation that his prime motivation and his goal are in practical terms as irreconcilable and far apart as heaven and hell.

But say I could repent and could obtain  
By act of grace my former state; how soon  
Would height recall high thoughts, how soon unsay  
What feigned submission swore...

(ibid., 93-96)

He, too, is what he is; he can no more undo himself as he can God's decree to dump him. More importantly, he has become who he is, namely Satan, by acts of his provocation, rebellion and subsequent fall when, second to God only, he could not conceive of another authority above his own when the absolute executive power over the Creation was invested upon the Son. Unfallen angels are not supposed to be partial to pride, self-pity or hatred and the fallen ones are not capable of reconciliation.

For never can true reconcilment grow  
Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep:  
Which would but lead me to a worse relapse,  
And heavier fall...  
This knows my punisher; therefore as far  
From granting he, as I from begging peace:  
All hope excluded...

(ibid., 98-105)

It is in this process of building hell within while at the same time reaching out of it that the infernal state of Satan's mind seems as if it had suddenly externalised before his very eyes and grew in space and time for him and his army to be condemned to it. Or worse, even to be carried with him, temporal and spatial, through time and space forever.

The time structures in such an unholy place are at once wholly interior and terribly physical. In temporal terms what was here described as a process is with Milton's Satan an instantaneous, a momentary if momentous realisation. Technically it must be conveyed in spatial terms for there was, before the Fall, apart from the points of narration requirements which mean little to immortal spirits, no real time to be measured by fractions. Yet time matters in hell. As everything else it was whole i.e. not fragmented, for there was no division within it before the variations of climate and seasons were introduced into our parts at the Expulsion by the inclination of Earth's axis. There was no death, the first pair were pious, healthy vegetarians, and carnivorous animals, I suppose, all ate grass. What there was of time was the sheer continuity of serene happiness and calm satisfaction, enormously enhanced by God's presence for man and angels, and, for all of the devils' party, suffering, caught as in a bubble in one single but eternally stretched point of time, somewhat redeemed by hoping against hope to be consumed by diversions of pagan pomp and circumstance and heroic action leading to defeat.

Though the poets were here following different traditions, Milton's Hell is not unlike Dante's, full of colour and contrast, taking pagan and Christian paradigms of underworld to their extremes. Devils' abode is at various points described as vast territories of volcanic or arctic wastelands, of sorrowful watery plains and craggy mountain ridges, of scorching deserts and bitter darklands, where the Christian torture chambers, prepared for them by God, and large pandemonic vistas of Roman and Oriental splendour, created with devilish technology by the industrious inhabitants themselves, combine the natural and artificial, historical spaces in a dazzling, romantic habitat. And, also, it is a land of controversy: time in hell is felt most when its inhabitants are engaged in conceits about the future of their opponents or their own. It is construed in terms of plots and subplots, arguments and counter-arguments in great argumentative passages which the devils seem to enjoy as much as we do. In short, time in Hell is Evil itself.

On the other hand, heavenly time is of no consequence for the epic or its heroes. On the whole it is perceived through the synchronised action of the *Primum Mobile* and the lower inner spheres as the *Music of Time*, created by the movement of the universal structure, which, as we are told, is what the angelic voices and instruments are in canonical harmony with when they engage in hymnal symphonies to glorify their maker. The created paradise, the Garden of Eden, reflects the heavenly order, but only to the point of the Fall. The fallen man no longer hears the music of the spheres and cannot partake in joyous harmonies of angelic choirs. From then onwards the earthly music, the orpheic tradition, strives for the angelic perfection but is of itself time-divided, making the musical beat, I suppose, something of a hellish invention.

In physical terms Milton's universe was largely derived from Ptolemaic system (VIII, 66-178) with some Copernican adaptations as possible alternative points of reference. For Milton Earth is central and stationary, the moon, sun and planets revolve round it in their spheres, a kind of transparent globes in which they are set. Above the moon's sphere everything is eternal and ethereal ( i.e. filled with ether, long thought to be the purest of substances ), while all sublunary things, much like Donne's 'sublunary lovers' in *Valediction forbidding mourning*, are subject to change.

This is all common enough if a bit mechanical for Milton. The Spanish poet G. de Bocángel<sup>6</sup> has found, within the same concept of the eternal/changing Universe, another way around it:

El concertado impulso de los Orbes  
es un reloj de Sol y al Sol advierte  
que también es morto que más dura.

The thing worth pointing out is again the paradigmatic nature of the concept as far as it effects the human condition. For the regularity of the macrocosm, such as of the stars above the planets fixed in a sphere below the liquid crystalline globe and the "outer convex" of *Primum Mobile*, was designed as a model of obedience for man - a microcosm, whose inner self and body as well as the actions of the whole of his race should imitate the heavenly order. On the other hand, deep down under the perfectly ordered empyrean ('fiery') heaven which crowns the whole structure of Creation, lie vast regions of Chaos, the abyss, a place of eternal discord of primal matter as yet unformed into substances, and at its very bottom gapes the infernal pit, a fiery dungeon of Hell with but one pair of gates where Sin and Death are keeping watch.

<sup>6</sup> Bocángel, *Obras*, ed. Benitez Claros, Madrid 1949, I., p. 90: see below.

Creating the material world, God as it were, scooped a hollow out of Chaos, giving shape to some of the dark chaotic matter and hanging the Earth on a golden chain from heaven, thus providing a staircase leading to an aperture in its outer shell and a passage through the spheres, where Satan enters the world and to which Sin and Death build their causeway through Chaos.

Again, all these are paradigmatic of the darker states of human soul and its actions, discordant and chaotic when yet unformed and abysmally unhappy when a resulting action is finally decided upon. The "distribution of bliss" or happiness, if I may say so, throughout the Universe, entirely depends on the distribution of the dark matter of Chaos through its various regions. Satan's own dark, sun hating soul is as remarkable for being the place of the quintessential darkness as are the high pinnacles of Heaven for the total absence of it. The Godhead, itself the source of all light, the emanation of *the coeternal beam*, of course stands outside the scope of any describable condition, happiness included. Thus the Earth with its central position in the universe, stationary but capable of change, is indeed held in the balance. It is where the powers that be will eventually arrive at a decision about everything and for all time.

There are other passages which speak for such concept of time-space relationship, some of them very long, notably Michael's long speeches in books XI and XII, where all dramatic elements were abandoned for the sake of presenting us with the history of times as such. And speaking of history of times, in his excellent *La cultura del Barrocco* Jose Antonio Maravall, when discussing the elements of *una cosmovision barrocca* explains one such thought-structure which also happens to be conventional and paradigmatic, namely, the prevailing concept of time - space relationship during the Spanish 17th century. "*El tiempo es como el lugar*", writes Maraval, "*en que todo se encuentra, en que todo se halla depositado. En él adquieren su forma y presencia las cosas y en él desaparecen al pasar, no quedando más que el tiempo, porque éste es lo que todos, conforme ya hemos visto, vienen a estimar como lo único continuo, permanente: el mudar, el pasar, el cambiar y moverse.*"<sup>7</sup>

Milton's mythopoetic structures of paradigmatic time-space relationships are therefore indicative of the wider European thought patterns of post-renaissance ways of structuring the worlds and should be like Shakespeare's more dramatic and mimetic art rendered as such in any successful modern translation.

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<sup>7</sup> J. A. Maravall, *La Cultura del Barroco. Análisis de una estructura histórica*, 4<sup>a</sup>ed., Barcelona, pp. 382-383.