



Translator's Note

by Ronald Puppo

Our aim has been to render Verdaguer into rhythmic, readable, modern English verse. The choice of meter and rhyme in the translations varies, as in the original works, with the form and content of each poem. For instance, consistent with the epic tone of *Canigó*, we have used iambic pentameter combined with trimeter in “La Maladeta” and blank verse in “Guisla.”

On the other hand, the faster-paced *Two Christian Martyrs of Ausona* uses tetrameter for Verdaguer's feminine decasyllables, and in “Discovery of the Virgin” we have used pentameter combined with tetrameter to achieve a natural narrative flow. For “The Two Bell Towers,” elegiac in tone, and the sustained exaltation of the ode “To Barcelona,” we have used rhyming iambic pentameter (with some metrical variation) to render Verdaguer's decasyllables in the former and, in the latter, his masterful dodecasyllabic alexandrines, feminine at the caesura (that is, with an unstressed, uncounted seventh syllable). Verdaguer uses these same alexandrines in “La Maladeta,” rhyming *abcc*, with a final half-alexandrine *b* rhyme:

*Passaren anys, passaren centúries de centúries
abans que s'abrigassen de terra i de bosquíes
aqueixes ossaments dels primitius gegants,
abans que tingués molsa la penya, flors les prades,
abans que les arbredes tinguessen aucellades,
les aucellades cants.*

rendered in English by iambic pentameter (with some variation) and a final trimeter:

Years passed, centuries piled on centuries,
Before this bone-frame of primeval giants
Dressed itself in topsoil and timberland,
Before the crags grew moss, the meadows flowers,
Before the forests filled with thronging birds,
The thronging birds with song.

Here, and throughout the translations, internal rhyme, weak rhyme, slant rhyme, alliteration, assonance and other rhythmic elements combine to balance and compensate where it has not always been possible to reproduce the Catalan end rhyme. (Nor does the epic and narrative tradition in English poetry always feature end rhyme, as in Milton, Longfellow and Tennyson.) Similar criteria hold for Verdaguer's lyric poetry. The feminine decasyllables of “The Harp” are rendered in iambic/trochaic tetrameter; the shorter hexasyllables of “The Rose of Jericho” and pentasyllables of “Thorns” are concisely rendered in English dimeter; and the modern ironic tone of “Begging,” conveyed in octosyllables by Verdaguer, finds an English correspondence in stanzas of alternating tetrameter/trimeter rhyming *ababcdcdee* with final tetrameter couplets. Similar metrical considerations hold for the *Rose Almanac*, *Saint Francis* and *Flowers of Calvary* poems, devotional and intimist, yet surprisingly modern in tone; in “*Sum vermis*” Verdaguer's desperate resolve is conveyed in blank verse, rendered in English by lines of varying length to suggest the rhythms of

ordinary speech. In the more lyrical “By the Sea” and “What is Poetry?” the English versions adhere once again to fixed metrics and rhyme; and while the predominantly blank-verse metrics of “The Milky Way” are translated into non-rhyming English tetrameter, Verdaguer’s five-line stanzas of decasyllables with fourth-line hexasyllables in “The Moon” find their equivalent English rhythm in tetrameter and dimeter, respectively. Finally, the heptasyllabic romance “To a Nightingale from Vallvidrera” is rendered in English combining tetrameter and trimeter to convey the poet’s heartfelt complaint with appropriate concision and rhythm.

The fragments of *L’Atlàntida* translated by Verdaguer’s contemporary William Bonaparte-Wyse—reproduced here with minor revisions (see endnotes)—have been included as testimony to the far-reaching impact of Verdaguer’s work in his day. Antoinette Ogden’s translation of “A Mother’s Love” and Deems Taylor and Kurt Schindler’s translation of “A Choirboy Died” (in the endnotes) have been included for the same reason.

Not all considerations have been purely poetical. Lexical and lexicographic issues come into play too. The field of significations of the Catalan loan word “sardana” is narrower in English (referring only to the dance or its music), while the Catalan phrase *feien ... la sardana* in “The Harp” conveys the extended meaning “joined hands in play.” The Catalan *barretina*, in the same poem, remains for English lexicographers an exoticism—despite popularization of this traditional hat by Catalan painter Salvador Dalí—and therefore appears in italics. Morphology frequently enters the picture as well; for instance, the Catalan *aucell* (bird) forms a collective noun by adding the suffix *-ada* (*aucellada*), rendered in *Two Christian Martyrs of Ausona* as “birdthrong” and in “La Maladeta” as “thronging birds.”

George Steiner once described translating as “an exact art,” which when most effective “bestows on the original *that which was already there.*” The creative challenge of the translator lies in *recreating* the work—outside the symbolic universe from which it sprang—so that after all the semantic, syntactic, rhetorical and rhythmic reshuffling it is once again seen for what it is, only now through a prism that refracts its light and disperses it into spectrums thrown in new directions. It is our hope that through these translations, with all their textual refraction and dispersion, English readers might catch a glimpse of many Verdaguerian rainbows.