

# EXOTICS:

ATTEMPTS TO DOMESTICATE THEM.

BY

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“EXOTIC, *n.* A plant, shrub, or tree, not native; a plant introduced from a foreign country.” — *Webster.*



BOSTON:  
JAMES R. OSGOOD AND COMPANY,

Late Ticknor & Fields, and Fields, Osgood, & Co.

1875.

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UNIVERSITY PRESS: WELCH, BIGELOW, & Co.,  
CAMBRIDGE.

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*"Cælum, non animam, mutant, qui trans mare currunt."*

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THESE poems, visitors from other climes,  
Between whose homes and ours an ocean rolls,  
Have changed their language, metre, rhythm, rhymes ;  
But — let us hope — they have not changed their souls.

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## P R E F A C E .



**M**OST poetical translations resemble the reverse side of a piece of Gobelin tapestry. The figures and colors are there, but the charm is wanting.

But what is the use of making a translation at all, unless you can infuse into it some of that element which makes the original poem immortal? If the essential spirit, which is the attraction in it, has evaporated, of what advantage is the residuum? You present us with an English version of an ode of Horace or a song of Goethe; and we can only say, "If this were all, Horace and Goethe would not be remembered ten years. Why is it, then, that they are immortal?"

The reason why we who translate are not aware of our own failures is perhaps this, — that we are so enchanted with the original poem that we associate this pleasure with our own version. A translator

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does not see the baldness and prosaic character of his work, because every word suggests to him the beauty which it is meant to represent. So a person travelling through picturesque scenery sometimes makes rude sketches of what he sees, which convey to others no idea of the landscape; but to him they are associated with the light, the color, the perspective, the ineffable charm of nature, and so are valuable to him as souvenirs of the scene.

A successful translation must produce in the reader unacquainted with the original the same sort of feeling which *that* conveys. The ideal of a translation would be one which, if the original were lost, would remain forever as immortal. Without any thought of it as a translation, it should give us so much pleasure in itself as to live a life of its own in literature. Is this impossible? We have some examples to prove that it can be done.

Perhaps, of all authors, Horace is the most difficult to render into a modern language. If you translate him literally, the whole life of the ode is gone. If you give a free version, hoping to retain this vitality, you lose the classic, sharp-cut, and concise expression, where each word has the beauty and value of a gem; and you offer us a pleasant poem, belonging to the modern romantic school of literature. Yet

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even Horace has been sometimes adequately translated. The following lines in Dryden's version of Book III. carmen 29, which is justly said by Theodore Martin to be finer than the original, shows how a great poet can re-create in another language the best life of his author. It has all the energy, conciseness, and perfect expression of the original, with even more of freedom and fire.

“Happy the man, and happy he alone,  
He who can call to-day his own;  
He who, secure within, can say,  
‘To-morrow, do thy worst, for I have lived to-day.  
Be fair or foul, or rain or shine,  
The joys I have possessed, in spite of fate, are mine.  
Not heaven itself upon the past has power,  
But what has been, has been, and I have had my  
hour!’”

The rest of the translation is almost or quite as fine as this. It has a grander swell and more freedom of movement than the original, while it faithfully reproduces the thought, the tone, and the spirit of the Horatian ode.

Dryden was a great poet; but men of less genius than he have sometimes met with success in translating Horace. Take, as an example, Professor Conington's version of Book I. carmen 24, “*Quis desi-*

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derio." The first few lines are not equal to Horace; but those which follow certainly partake of the quality of the original.

"And sleeps he then the heavy sleep of death,  
Quintilius? Piety, twin sister dear  
Of Justice! naked Truth! unsullied Faith!  
When will ye find his peer?  
By many a good man wept, Quintilius dies;  
By none than you, my Virgil, trulier wept."

The genuine sense of the translator appears in the turn given to the last line in the word "trulier." The same comparative appears in the original, in a different word, "flebilior," —

"Nulli flebilior quam tibi, Virgili."

But the same effect is produced by "trulier," in English, which is conveyed by "flebilior" in the Latin. This is a touch of genius.

A poem is often like a gem. An ode of Horace or a song of Goethe has a flash like that which comes from the sharp facet of a diamond. Simply to render the thought is only to imitate the chemist, whose analysis transforms the diamond into charcoal. In English prose the magic of Horace and Goethe disappear. But in another class of poems, where



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the interest centres in the spirit, thought, and imagery, a prose version is often the best. After all the attempts made upon Homer and Dante, the most faithful prose is perhaps that which brings us nearest to these majestic authors.

A *portrait* is really a translation. It is an attempt at translating a human being into another language, — from life to art. Most portraits are therefore failures, and have little interest, except to those who are familiar with the original. But he who has seen portraits by the great masters — by Rubens and Titian, by Rembrandt and Vandyke, by Sir Joshua Reynolds and Gainsborough — is astonished to find these paintings as interesting as the ideal works of Raffaele or Correggio. Those masters were able to penetrate into the depths of the soul, and they gave on their immortal canvas the concentrated history of a human life. That which was deepest in the man, his quintessential spirit, is here fully explained to us. As it takes the great master to paint a perfect portrait, so it takes the great poet to perfectly translate a poem.

The best poetical translations are usually made by those who are poets themselves. Coleridge, in his *Wallenstein*, was able to introduce Schiller worthily to English readers. Some passages in the version surpass the original. I think there is nothing in the

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German play quite as good as those lines in which Wallenstein laments the death of Max, which close thus:—

“For O, he stood beside me like my youth,  
Transformed for me the Real into a dream,  
Clothing the palpable and the familiar  
With golden exhalations of the dawn.  
Whatever fortunes wait my future toils,  
The *Beautiful* is vanished, and returns not.”

When Dryden, Coleridge, Shelley, render a foreign poet into their own language, the stranger has received his naturalization-papers, and becomes henceforth a citizen of the English Parnassus. He has obtained the freedom of the city.

A test question to decide the success or failure of a translation might be this, “Can you recite your version aloud, in the presence of men of taste, so as to give them real pleasure?” If the poem is worth repeating aloud for its own sake, and gives satisfaction,—that is enough.

The difficulty of rendering German lyrical poetry into English is not so great as that of making adequate versions from Greek or Latin authors. These modern languages are sisterly, and lend each other a hand. Accordingly, we have some excellent Eng-

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lish poems, by such translators as Hedge, Furness, Brooks, Dwight, Leland, and others, which deserve to live a life of their own. But there is room for more.

The versions into German out of English poetry are often admirably good. We have seen an excellent one of Poe's "Raven," of which this is the first stanza:—

“Mitternacht war 's, stürmisch, schaurig, als ich müd' und  
matt und traurig  
Ueber manch' ein früh'res Streben hätt' gegrübelt hin  
und her ;  
Schlummern — schlafen fast — ich mochte, als mit einem  
mal es pochte,  
Als ob draussen leise pochte, leise pochte irgend wer —  
Das wird 's sein, und sonst nicht mehr.”

In an old number of Fraser's Magazine there is a rendering into German of Moore's song

“O the days are gone when Beauty bright  
My heart's chain wove,”

which seems to meet this requisition. Here is a stanza:—

“Ach! die Tage sind hin, als der Schönheitsmacht,  
Mein Herz erfuhr,

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Als mein Lebenstraum von der Früh' bis zur Nacht  
    War Liebe nur!  
    Wohl Hoffnung blüht,  
    Wohl Tage sieht  
    Mein Aug, einst mild und rein  
Doch stets wird der Liebe Jugendtraum  
    Das Schönste sein!  
Ach! stets wird der Liebe Jugendtraum  
    Das Schönste sein!"

What Matthew Arnold says of the qualities required to translate Homer may be generalized as a rule for all translation. He demands, first of all, that one "be penetrated by a sense of the qualities of his author." His criticisms on the translations of Homer by Pope, Cowper, Newman, and Chapman are all founded on this primary requisition. Each of them has failed, according to him. Cowper has failed because he has not reproduced the rapidity of Homer; Pope, because he does not give his plainness and directness of language; Chapman, because he loses his plainness and directness of ideas; and Newman, because he does not appreciate the nobleness of his author.

As each of the writers of whose work we have here imported specimens has qualities of his own, we have probably sometimes failed in finding and

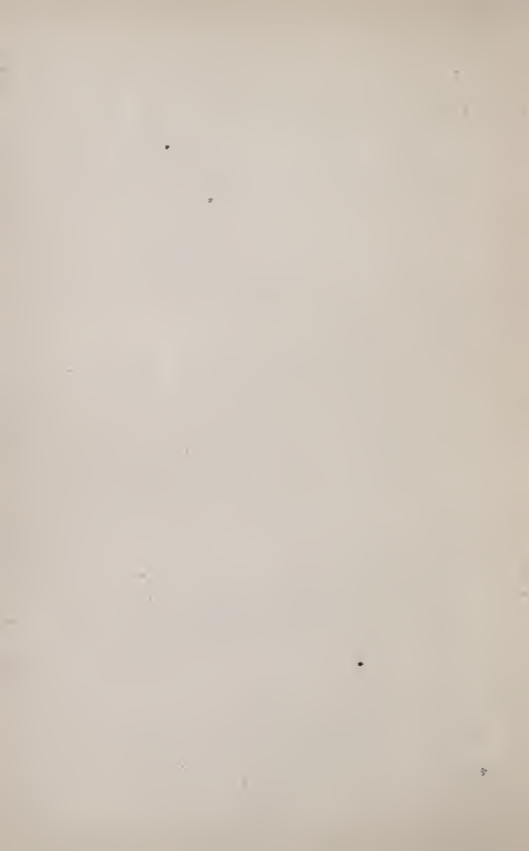
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reproducing them. We willingly leave to our readers the pleasure of discovering these failures. A French writer says that it is the business of critics to watch authors, not that of authors to watch critics. We therefore fall back on the Horatian valedictory, —

“Vive: vale! Si quid novisti rectius istis,  
Candidus imperti: si non, his utere mecum”;

which may be thus rendered, —

“If this book suits you, call yourself our debtor;  
If not, take pains, and give us something better.”



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[NOTE. — The translations with the following numbers were made by L. C. : Nos. 11, 15, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40. The remaining poems were translated by J. F. C.]

IV.

THE WITCH.

CHILD! attend to what I say;  
Do not turn, nor look away.  
Roguish eye! you must not wink,  
I shall tell you all I think.  
Here! Hollo! Don't look away.  
Child, attend to what I say!

You 're not homely, that is true!  
You 've an eye that 's clear and blue;  
Cunning mouth and little nose  
Have their merits, I suppose.  
Charming is the word to fit it, —  
Yes, you 're charming; I admit it.

Charming here and charming there,  
But no *empress* anywhere.  
No! I cannot quite allow  
Beauty's crown would suit your brow.  
Charming there and charming here  
Do not make a queen, my dear.

*THE WITCH.*

For I know a hundred girls,  
Brown as berries, fair as pearls,  
Each of whom might claim the prize  
Given to loveliest lips and eyes, —  
Yes, a hundred might go in,  
Challenge you, sweet child, and win.

A hundred beauties, did I say?  
Why, what a number! Yet there may  
A hundred thousand girls combine  
To drive thee from this heart of mine;  
May try together, try alone, —  
*My* empress they cannot dethrone.

Whence, then, this imperial right  
Over me, your own true knight?  
Like an empress is your reign  
In my heart, for joy or pain;  
Death or life, your royal right,  
He accepts, — your own true knight.

Roguish lip and roguish eye,  
Look at me, and make reply.  
Witch! I wish to understand  
How I came into your hand.  
Look at me and make reply:  
Tell me, roguish lip and eye.

Up and down I search to see  
The meaning of this mystery.

*THE WITCH.*

Tied so tight, by *nothing*, dear?  
Ah! there must be magic here!  
Up and down, sweet sorceress, tell!  
Where 's your wand, and what 's your spell?