

BUENO ALONSO, Jorge L. 2010. *Beowulf*. Vigo: Rinoceronte Editora S.L. 163 pp. ISBN: 978-84-92866-17-5.

If it is always a joyous occasion to announce a translation of the epic poem *Beowulf* into a modern language, the joy is double if it is *the first* translation of the poem into that language, as is the case with Jorge L. Bueno Alonso's rendering of the Anglo-Saxon work into the Galician language, just published by Rinoceronte Ediciones in its Vetera series.

With his translation of *Beowulf* into Galician, Dr. Bueno Alonso has faced a remarkably serious challenge, and the result cannot be more satisfactory. His translation is commendable for many reasons: to begin with, it is a verse translation,¹ secondly it is an alliterative one, and thirdly, it is simply an excellent translation. The text lacks nothing of the rhythm and power of the Anglo-Saxon original while very faithfully reproducing the story of the Anglo-Saxon heroes, monsters and kings to the smallest details. Dr. Bueno's work is a beautiful, musical and fluid literary piece, which is entertaining, engrossing and delightful to read. Can this be done without a profound knowledge of the Old English language as well as of the textual, editorial and linguistic problems of the Anglo-Saxon canonical works? I don't think so, and this is something Dr. Bueno must necessarily be credited for.

Translating Old English into a modern Romance language is a hard task, and not within everybody's scope. To accomplish this task the author produced his own edition of the text from the original manuscript, contrasting the difficult or controversial bits with the opinions and theories of other specialists. Extensive documentation and informative rigour shines through all the text of the translation, thus paying homage to the labour of so many good philologists and writers, from Tolkien to Liuzza, and from Thorkelin to Heaney. From his edition of the original text the author has attempted basically "to translate poetry into poetry" (p. 26), taking special care in reproducing the rhythm and beat of the Old English alliterative verse as faithfully as possible. This concern is reflected in the author's self-imposed requirement to have two (or preferably three) alliterative positions in each verse of the translation, which imposes a very

¹ Let's remember all translations of *Beowulf* into the Castilian language were prose ones until Lerate and Lerate (1986).

tight harness on the translatorial work. But it works: when we read Jorge L. Bueno's translation of *Beowulf* there is something of the rhythm of the old epic poem ringing in our ears, everything flows in a very natural way, and we are easily carried away by the musicality of it all. It doesn't matter if the original structure of the poem is slightly distorted at times (a strict necessity if the alliterative requirements mentioned before are to be met): here the goal is to achieve a poetic text and therefore reproducing the original structure literally is out of the question. This is possibly the reason why we don't get line numbers in the translation (they wouldn't match the lines in the original text), although some could feel a need for them. Other debatable points are the author's choice to retain the original division of the poem into 43 parts of "fitts", and the inclusion of a heading at the beginning of each one of them as a subtitle. I personally am all for it. None of these decisions seriously hinder the progress of the reading of the text, and the headings are good guidance for the modern reader, especially for those not familiar with the intricacies of the stories and sub-stories inside *Beowulf*.

Finally, I would like to mention that the volume includes an interesting introduction, with some background information on the history of *Beowulf* as a manuscript and *Beowulf* as a literary piece, which is clear, informative, and particularly interesting for those not familiar with the vicissitudes of the earliest English literary documents.

All in all, I think Jorge L. Bueno's translation of *Beowulf* into the Galician language is excellent news. It represents not only one more step in the diffusion of a "minority" language which will be appreciated and enjoyed by thousands of Galician speakers worldwide, but also a remarkable contribution to the universality of the Anglo-Saxon masterpiece. I am sure it will be a reference text for a long time and I cannot but congratulate the author on it.

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