

[] The exact date of Milton's first verse translation into English is unclear, but as his biographer Parker claims "[w]are on surer ground" (p.18) if any survey commences with his versions of Psalms 114 and 136. In his *Poems* (1645), in which they were first published, Milton claims in a head-note that "they were done by the Author at fifteen years old", that is in 1624; this claim is generally accepted. At this time Milton had no Hebrew, though he would later learn the language. As has been argued (for example by Studley), these early exercises are not so much translations as paraphrases: there is considerable expansion of content, and Milton draws freely upon the a well established tradition of Psalm translations. Here, he is indebted to Buchanan's Latin metrical Psalter (1566), and Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas (1621).

[] Milton translated two further groups of Psalms: his version of Psalms 80-88, published in *Poems* (1673), are dated April 1648; those of 1-8 are all, with the exception of the first, given specific dates in August 1653. By this time Milton knew Hebrew, and he claimed in a note to the 1648 group that "all but what is in a different Character are the very words of the Text, translated from the Original". Yet, both groups are not in any sense literal translations. The 1648 group comes closest: written in simple ballad stanzas, it contains few additions which are not an expansion of ideas expressed in the Hebrew, in the Authorized Bible (1611), in Tremellius's Latin Bible (1579), and most interestingly, in a recently printed Syriac text (1553). Yet, like other Puritan Psalters, some of its amplifications are clearly political: for example this resonant gloss is added to lines 11-12 of Ps.87: "I mention Egypt, *where proud Kings / Did our forefathers yoke*".

[] The translation of psalms 1-8 in 1653 was undertaken when Milton was relieved

of official duties due to his blindness. In composition, then, he relied on memory, the reading of others and standard prose translations. This group, though, is something of a tour de force: eight different metrical forms are used. It is most interesting, again, for Milton's additions. As has been noted (Studley), Ps.6 is the most striking example: neither the word "dark" (1. 14), nor the idea that the psalmist is being "mark[ed]" by all his "enemies" (1. 15) is in the original. It has also been argued that this group of Psalm translations marks Milton's mature prosody (see Hunter).

[] There is much debate over the date of Milton's other significant verse translation, Horace's "Fifth Ode" (see Parker pp. 720-21). It may have been begun as early as 1629 and been continually revised up until 1655. It was published in 1673 with a note which captures its fidelity to the original: "Rendered almost word for word without rhyme according to the Latin measure, as near as the language will permit".

[] Many of Milton's prose works contain translations or paraphrases from Classical authors: for example, *Areopagitica* (1644) is headed by a translation of Euripedes *Supplices* 438-41, and *Tetrachordon* (1645) includes a translation of Horace's *Epistle* I xvi 40-45. However, his only extended prose translation is *The Judgement of Martin Bucer* (1644), which is based upon chapters 15-47 of the second part Bucer's *De Regno Christi* (1577). Milton was drawn to the work as it supported his own arguments on marriage; and, like his verse translation, it is at times a very free rendering with its own agenda: he cuts material which is not relevant to his own position on divorce, adds his own comments, and drops and adds Biblical quotation in equal measure -- here he relies loosely, as is his practice in his English works, on the Authorized Version (see Fletcher pp. 23-290).

[] *Martin Bucer* is, perhaps, most interesting though insofar as it reveals Milton's response to the rather prolix Latin style of a sixteenth-century theologian. Milton was critical of what he called the "knotty Africanisms" of the Church Fathers (Of *Reformation* 1641) and his contemporaries' rejection of "the native Latinism of Cicero". (*An Apology against a Pamphlet* 1641); yet, he is often accused himself of being overly latinate in his English. Here, however, he avoids Latin constructions and derivatives to a large extent, producing a surprisingly compact prose in direct contrast to the elaboration and amplification common amongst Elizabethan translators (see Mattheissen pp. 129-227). He frequently converts a Latin passive into an active verb, the subjunctive into the indicative or the infinitive. Thus, for example, the phrase "Hoc facile perspiceat, quicumque ista Dei pronunciata, ex Spiritu Domini consideraverit & ponderaverit" is rendered without use of the future perfect as simply: "This he will easily perceive, who considers these things in the Spirit of the Lord." Surprisingly, for a poet, he takes this simplifying practice to the extreme of often replacing figurative expressions with plainer statements.

[] Milton was involved directly in translation in one other capacity: from 1649 until 1659 he served first as Secretary for Foreign Tongues and then, because of his blindness, from 1653 as one of a number of Latin Secretaries. A major part of his duties in both positions was the translation of English or Latin draft documents from the Council of State into Latin, and the translation of communications from foreign powers into English. In this role, as recent investigation has established (see Miller), Milton attempted to maintain a simple clear style, similar to his later English prose. His Latin translations were in what he held to be the purest Classical Latin, or if necessary in what Miller characterizes as "neo-classical neo-Latin (p.6), only when no Classical phrase could be found to encompass a seventeenth-century phrase or

concept. As a translator, across a range of languages, then, Milton aimed at the direct expression found in *Martin Bucer*, and in his later English prose (see Corns).

[] Finally, though, Milton's most telling remark on his role as translator must be noted. He wrote in the "Post-script" to *Martin Bucer*: "my Mother bore me a speaker of what God made mine own, and not a Translator."

[] Further Reading:

Burnett, Archie, "The Fifth Ode of Horace Lib. 1 and Milton's Style" *Milton Quarterly* 16 (1982) 68-72.

Collette, Carolyn, "Milton's Psalm Translations: Petition and Praise" *English Literary Renaissance* 2 (1972) 243-59.

Corns, Thomas, *The Development of Milton's Prose Style*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Fallon, Robert, *Milton in Government*, Pitts. Pennsylvania: Penn. State University Press, 1993 esp. Appendices pp. 215-268.

Fletcher, H.F., *The Use of the Bible in Milton's Prose*, Illinois: Illinois University Press, 1929.

Hunter, William B., "Milton Translates the Psalms" *Philological Quarterly* 40 (1961) 485-94.

Mattheisson, F.O., *Translation: An Elizabethan Art*, Camb. Mass: Harvard University Press, 1931, esp. pp. 129-227.

Miller, Leo, *Milton's Writings in the Anglo-Dutch Relations*, Pitts. Pennsylvania:

Duquense Univeristy Press, 1992.

Parker, William Riley, *Milton: A Biography*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968. See

index

entries under "Translation".

Studley, M.H., "Milton and his Paraphrases of the Psalms", *Philological Quarterly* 4

(1925) 364-72.