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4-17-1890

To Arthur R. Gledhill - April 17, 1890

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO ARTHUR R. GLEDHILL

Gardiner Apr 17 – 1890

Dear Art:--

Last night I copied off "Palaemon" and have herewith enclosed the same. You will find it rather close¹ for an attempt at poetical translation and you may have some trouble in deciphering it. But as you have read the original and are acquainted with the subject I guess you can follow the lines. Yesterday I finished a translation (blank verse (?)) of the "Galley Race"--Book V—104-285² I have also made one of the "Last Combat" Book XII 788-952 and "The Shield of Aeneas"³ Book VIII 597-731. Great sport but devilish hard work. In the Galley Race I worked two days on two lines--that is to say it was two days before I decided. This was the place:

--illa Noto citius volucrique sagitta
" ad terram fugit et portu se condidit alto. 242-243

Swift as the wind, in arrowy flight she speeds
And rides triumphant in the land-locked port."⁴

Don't be too harsh in your criticism but write and tell me what you think of it. You will notice the body of the thing to be in pentameters while the singing match is in Alexandrine couplets—as I wished to retain the appearance of the original as much as possible. Box all right.
Thanks. Yours. E.A.R.

If it is a possible
thing I will come
up your way some-
time this spring. I
should like to have
a smoke with you
and see the Diva.⁵

E.A.R.

-2-

Virgil—Eclogue III—Palaemon.--Copied and revised
solely for the delectation of A.R. Gledhill.⁶

Palaemon—Damoetas—Menalcas.

Menalcas.

Whose flock is that Damoetas? Meliboeus?

Damoetas.

No, Argon lately placed them in my care.

M.

O sheep! Forever an unhappy flock!
While, fearful of my own supremacy
Argon himself the fair Neaera courts,
The guard Damoetas drains them twice an hour
And robs the lambs and mothers of their milk.

D.

Less freedom sir in dealing words to men;
For well we know both who corrupted you
And what the goats with sidelong glances saw;
And more, we know the cave wherein 'twas done--
The kindly Dryads laughing all the while.
("And the good-natured Nymphs etc.")

-3-

M.

And doubtless too they saw me with my knife
To cut the vines and tender shoots of Ulycon.

D.

Or rather when amidst this ancient wood
You broke the arrows and the bow of Daphnis
Which you Menalcas grieved to see returned
And would have died but for the pain you gave him.

M.

Where are the masters while their raging slaves
Dare to address me thus! O wicked one,
Did I not see you trap the goat of Damon
Lycisca barking madly all the while time?
And when I called out, "Tityrus where ~~are you~~ goes he--
Collect your flock!"--you hid amid the sedge.

D.

And should he not yield up the goat to me,
Since with my voice and reed I conquered him?
If you would know it sir, the goat is mine:
Damon himself confessed as much to me
Yet says he cannot pay me what is due.

-4-

M.

You won [win?] a prize at singing! as if you
 Could play a waxen reed! Why, clown, 'tis yours
 To blow your murderous note upon the highway.

D.

So; shall we have a contest here between us?
 I'll stake the heifer, and, lest you refuse
 I'll say she comes to milking twice a day,
 And feeds two calves besides. Now, my good friend,
 What pawn will you advance to cover mine?

M.

I dare not meet thy wager from the flock:
 My father is at home, and worse than that
 A crabbed step-dame: both count twice a day
 The sheep, and one the kids. But I will pledge--
 Since tis your will to carry out this folly--
 What you yourself will own far worthier:
 These beechen cups wrought by Alcimedon
 On which the ivy, exquisitely carved
 With facile chisel, sweetly intermingles
 Its scattered fruit and pallid foliage.

-5-

Two figures are engraved in the center:
 The one is Conon, and—who was the other?--
 Who with his rod marks out the world for man--
 The time for ploughing and for harvesting?
 These are kept hidden; lips have never touched them.

D.

Alcimedon has made for me two bowls
 And wound the handles round with soft acanthus;
 With Orpheus graven in a woodland scene.
 These two are hidden; lips have never touched them.
 Yet if you will but look upon my heifer
 The cups are nothing to deserve your praise.

M.

Let there be no delay, for I will come
 Whenever^a you may call. Or let the one

^a WA suggests the alternative, "Wherever".

Who now approaches hear us—look--Palaemon.
And I will take good care that in the future
Damoetas tortures no man with his voice.

D.

Begin, if you have anything to sing;
You'll find me ready, nor will I dispute

-6-

The judgement; therefore, my good friend Palaemon,
I pray you balance well within your mind
This contest; 'tis no trifling affair.

Palaemon.

Sing, as we sit ~~among~~ amid the tufted grass:
Now all the field and all the wood is blooming;
The trees are green, and the year is in its glory.
Begin Damoetas, and Menalcas follow;
Alternately—the way the Muses love.

D.

Begin with Jove, O Muse! all things are full of Jove:
'Tis he that loves the earth; 'tis he that loves my song.

M.

Phoebus loves me: for him I ever keep close by
His chosen gifts; the laurel and blushing hyacinth.

D.

Galatea, playful maiden, seeks me with an apple;
Then flies, but wishes to be seen before she hides.

M.

My flame Amyntas comes ~~to~~ of his own will to me,
And Delia to my dogs is now no better known.

-7-

D.

I'll make my love a gift: for I have found the spot
Where the high-soaring pigeons rear their tender young.

M.

I've sent my love ten apples all ruddy from the woodland--
As many as I could: I'll send ten more to-morrow.

D.

How many and how sweet the words of Galatea!
Bear them aloft ye winds, so may th'immortals hear them.

M.

Where is my joy, although you hold me dear, Amyntas,
While you pursue the goats for me to tend the toils?

D.

Bid Phyllis come to me, Iolas; tis my birthday.
I offer sacrifice ere long; then you may come.

M.

But I love Phyllis ~~more~~ more: she weeps at separation;
And cries "Farewell! Farewell! a long farewell!"--Iolas.

D.

Wolves to the flock are fatal; showers to ripened grain;
Wind to the trees; to me the wrath of Amarylis.

-8-

M.

Rain cheers the crops; arbutus is sweet to tender ~~lamb's~~ kids;
Osier to laden sheep, to me none save Amyntas.

D.

Great Pollio loves to hear the rustic song I sing
O mountain Muses, rear a heifer to your lover.

M.

He writes a wondrous song: Oh, feed the bull that now
Lifts high his head and spurns the sand beneath his feet.

D.

Who loves thee, Pollio, may win thy cherished fame:
For him may honey flow and brambles bear amomum.

M.

Who hates not Bavius must love thy song O Maevius!
And he would milk a butting goat, or yoke his foxes.

D.

O boys, who gather flowers and growing ~~fruits~~ fruits of earth,
Flee hence!--a long cold snake is lying in the grass.

M.

My sheep, go not too near! You cannot trust the bank:
For even now the ram shakes out his dripping fleece.

-9-

D.

O Tityrus, from the stream call back your feeding flock:
Ere long I'll wash them all my myself, in yonder spring.

M.

O boys, collect the sheep: if summers burning heat
As formerly, destroys the milk we work in vain.

D.

Alas! how lank and lean my bull stands in the field!
The love that kills the herd will kill the keeper too.

M.

But love is not in mine: their bones scarce hold together:
I cannot tell the eye that charms my tender lambs.

D.

Oh, tell me in what land, and be my great Apollo,
Only three ells of sky lie open to the sight.

M.

Oh, tell me in what land the written names of kings
Are born with blooming flowers and Phyllis shall be thine.

Pal.

'Tis not for me to judge so fine a matter;
The prize belongs to one as to the other:

-10-

To anyone who sings of love so sweet,
Or labors through such sorrow.--Now, my boys
The rivers close—the fields have drank their fill.

Nov. 1889

NOTES

1. SL reads "loose," which reverses EAR's intent. The typescript from which SL was prepared read "close" originally, but "loose" was substituted during the editorial process because of the assumption that a poetical translation takes liberties with the text, accuracy being sacrificed for poetry. EAR's point was that he had achieved accuracy *and* poetry.
2. Published in *The Reporter Monthly* (Gardiner, Me.), May 31, 1890. Reprinted in Hogan, pp. 167-173.
3. No longer extent.
4. EAR's study of Milton is manifest in these sinewy lines.
5. SL notes that Gledhill's fiancée was a singer.
6. SL contains numerous misreadings.