



Reseñas

DARÍO, RUBÉN. *Songs of Life and Hope: Cantos de vida y esperanza*. Will Derusha and Alberto Acereda eds., trans. Durham: Duke U P, 2004.
[Hipertexto](#)

This newly edited and newly translated bilingual edition of what many would consider Darío's master work, published at the height of his poetic maturity (1905), is a triumph insofar as it accomplishes the goal of its inception. The translation team clearly states the need for further scholarship on Darío, who on one hand is considered an icon of Latin American *modernismo*, and on the other is critically ignored, or forgotten, especially in the English-speaking world. This work endeavors to "restore the purity of Darío's text and second to reproduce in English a sense of the original poetry in all its elegance, rhythm, thematic eclecticism and suggestiveness" (2)

The intention of this book is to reach the widest audience possible and it aims to offer insight to "teachers, students and lovers of poetry" (2) including non-specialists. This particular goal is appropriately achieved by the inclusion of a simple, yet extensive glossary of mythical, geographic, literary and cultural references which a non-specialist, or an English language reader, may not possess as background knowledge.

In the naming of this work, Darío created the most poetic of juxtapositions, songs of life and hope, whose primary preoccupation is with time lost, silent desperation, and the inevitability of death. The poet rails against eternity, invoking images of the Artist in all ways, questioning the ability of Art to express the sublime; elevating the erotic to levels of ecstasy, and Woman --her mystical power of creation-- as not only divine inspiration, but the only possibility of salvation. Perhaps most interestingly, this work calls to the "modern" reader almost one hundred years from its original publication, manifesting issues of "progress" and imperialism, alienation and despair which still resound today, and are still achingly, beautifully present. The republication of this work, in not just translation, but bilingual format, proposes a new juxtaposition, rejuvenating the "songs" and requiring new introspection.

The introductory essay is a thoughtful and thorough examination of the life and work of Darío, which pulls no punches with respect to Darío's foibles and misadventures. It does elucidate upon and defend Darío's choice of romantic imagery over political militancy – a crime of which many of his detractors

accused him. Additionally, it serves not only to make a case for a more rigorous study of Darío's oeuvre, but invites readers not typically confronted with Darío, to step closer and examine, to immerse themselves in his poetic world. The quality of scholarship which supports this edition is outstanding, addressing questions of both methodology and purpose. Derusha and Acereda not only outline their sources for arriving at a definitive and accurate edition of Darío's own work, they address the polemic of literary translation, and specifically, the problem of poetry. Additionally, the extensive bibliography includes a section on literary translation for further research purposes.

In the translation of any text, there is always the possibility of multiple interpretations. With the translation of poetry there has long been a debate as to whether to translate just the "idea" and remain faithful to the poetic form and rhyme, often embellishing, or to be overly faithful to the literal meaning rendering a lifeless image of what the poetry once was in its original form. Derusha and Acereda attempt to reconcile these two camps, opting to "forgo rhyme in favor of preserving rhythm and meaning" (3) while maintaining a "unity of voice" or "vision" (3) throughout the entire work.

Despite their best efforts, at times, the English language simply falls flat in reflecting Darío's mastery of form, and the reader, in these cases, is encouraged to read, and sound out, the side-by-side Spanish version, as in this stanza of poem I:

Potro sin freno se lanzó mi instinto,
mi juventud montó potro sin freno;
iba embriagada y con puñal al cinto;
si no cayó, fue porque Dios es bueno.
(54)

An unbridled colt, my instinct took off,
my youth rode an unbridled colt;
it went about intoxicated and with a dagger in its belt;
if it didn't fall off, that was because God is good.
(55)

Nevertheless, the success of this work is precisely in its faithful translation of not only meaning but rhythm, and in keeping with the unity of voice, they have respected the "erudite tone"(3) so prevalent in Darío's poetry, often opting for less common English word-choice, as evidenced in this stanza of "Seascape" from the third section, "Other poems":

Velas de los Colones
y velas de los Vascos,
hostigadas por odios de ciclones
ante la hostilidad de los peñascos;
o galeras de oro,
velas purpúreas de bajeles
que saludaron el mugir del toro
celeste, con Europa sobre el lomo
que salpicaba la revuelta espuma.

Magnífico y sonoro
se oye en las aguas como
un tropel de tropeles,
tropel de los tropeles tritones!
(176)

Sails of the Colombuses
and sails of the Vascos,
flogged by the hatred of cyclones
into the hostility of crags;
or golden galleys,
purple sails of vessels
that greeted the bellow of the bull
of the sky, with Europa on his back,
splashing and churning foam.
Magnificent and sonorous
it is heard in the waters like
a throng of throngs,
throng of the throngs of tritons!
(177)

In this translation, there is by no means a “dumbing down” of Darío’s original, despite the fact that there is an implied audience beyond the traditional scope of academia. In fact, if the academic would like a critical edition with footnotes and explanations, this is not it. *Songs of Life and Hope* is first and foremost about poetry, not surprisingly reflecting Darío’s own reticence towards the binding institutions of Culture. It is a celebration of the sound and eclecticism that made Darío famous, and at the same time, previously inaccessible to such a wide audience.

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