

Hary. 2023. *La gesta de sir Guillermo Wallace*. Traducción, introducción y notas de Fernando Toda Iglesia. Biblioteca Contemporánea 1. Málaga: UMA Editorial. Pp. 445. ISBN 9788413352633.

Barbour, John. 2024. *La gesta de Roberto de Bruce*. Traducción, introducción y notas de Fernando Toda Iglesia. Biblioteca Contemporánea 2. Málaga: UMA Editorial. Pp. 417. ISBN 9788413353821.

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The figures of Robert the Bruce and William Wallace became inextricably bound together in the public mind ever since they adopted the faces of Angus Macfadyen (Bruce) and Mel Gibson (Wallace) in the 1995 film *Braveheart*. An international commercial blockbuster, it won five of the ten Academy Awards it had been nominated for, including Best Picture and Best Director.¹ It is true that Scotland is an iconic land in itself—hence, a favourite among writers, musicians and filmmakers: *Braveheart* simply added its due share to the tourist industry. William Wallace, however, does owe his worldwide fame to the film, while Robert the Bruce has ended up somewhat overshadowed by him. As was to be expected, in the film, Bruce, the victor at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, the king that secured the independence of Scotland by signing the Treaty of Northampton in 1328, seems to be there solely to be converted to the Faith of Scottish Independence by the heroic Wallace. Although subsequent films continued the story of Robert the Bruce, in a sort of “What happened to,”² they were never as successful as *Braveheart* was.

According to Randall Wallace, the author of the screenplay and the novel,³ he first learnt about William Wallace when on a trip to Scotland in search of his

¹ Mel Gibson was also the director of the film; he had previously been awarded the same accolade for the Golden Globe Awards. The production did not receive the same universal acclaim from critics—not to mention historians.

² Notably, in the 2019 production *Robert the Bruce*, with the same actor, Angus Macfadyen, in the same role.

³ Whether it was a tie-in novel or it was being written at the same time as the screenplay has remained unclear in the literature about Randall Wallace. What is beyond dispute is that the script

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family ancestry. He claims to have started devising the story before he undertook any extensive research, and that only afterwards he read (but more on this later) the *circa* 12,000-line fifteenth-century epic poem (1478) on Wallace's heroic exploits by Hary (he is better known by the names Blind Harry or Harry the Minstrel). The story of Robert the Bruce had also been sung a century earlier: in 1376, John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen, had written the *Bruce*, a *circa* 13,000-line poem.

Fernando Toda's translations of both poems, rendered into Spanish for the first time from Early and Middle Scots respectively, are a most welcome and most necessary contribution to the knowledge of a decisive period in the history and the literature of Scotland and two of its key figures, not only amongst the general public, but most crucially, amongst the Spanish-speaking academic community. With his flawless renditions, Professor Toda, himself a distinguished academic, especially in the field of English historical linguistics and of translation studies, and with a long renown career as a translator into Spanish of classics like, among others, Charles Dickens, Walter Scott, or Edith Wharton, opens up many reliable avenues along which a varied Spanish readership may either gain access for the first time or arrive to a better knowledge of the country, the men, the legends, the history, the literature, and the languages around *La gesta de sir William Wallace* and *La gesta de Roberto de Bruce* (an updated and thoroughly revised version of his 1998 translation)—WW and RB henceforth—have been published in the series Biblioteca Contemporánea of the University of Málaga, which actually began with them. As stated on the back flap on each volume, the collection “propone una biblioteca esencial de nuestro tiempo” (“suggests an essential library for our times”),⁴ aiming at broadening the realm of the classical with works from both high culture and popular literature.

This is one single review of two books that, whilst standing on their own as works that can be read separately, are so closely intertwined—theme, period, genre, historical events, political agenda—that they could perhaps be seen, in many respects, as volume I and II of a single major translation project, very finely accomplished indeed. The two books must be reviewed together and it would be advisable to read them one after the other—preferably in the chronological order they have been published in the series. Thus, the readers will find themselves immersed in a very cinematic flashback and flash-forward effect, perfectly suited to the narrative unfolding before their eyes.

WW and RB share almost identical structures: Introduction (11–67 in WW and 11–60 in RB), the translation itself, appendices, reference section, and a map of Scotland in the time of Wallace and Bruce. There are also 539 footnotes in WW

was nominated for Best Original Screenplay in both the Academy and the Writers Guild Awards (where *Wallace* was the winner).

⁴ My translation for this and the subsequent quotations in the review.

and 402 in RB, containing philological, bibliographical, geographical, historical, and cultural information from a wide variety of sources, including personal experience. As far as the appendices are concerned, and as it could not be otherwise, the map, family trees summarising the Scottish succession crisis and the Scottish origin of the Stuarts, and a table showing the connections between the two poems and the translations are the same in both books. The detailed timeline of Scottish independence (1290) focuses on different highlights in each poem. Particularly moving are the lament for Scotland after Wallace's imprisonment in WW, and the famous *Eulogy of freedom* and Bruce's speech before the battle of Bannockburn in RB: Fernando Toda has included bilingual presentations of his renderings in blank hendecasyllables. From pages 381 to 390 of RB, Toda reports and discusses recent research on James Douglas's expedition in Spain and provides a translation of the synopsis of the poem's narrative by Mathew P. McDiarmid, published in his 1985 edition.

The structure of the Introductions is very similar as well: exhaustive treatments of the historical background, the authors and their works, the original texts, and the translator's rationale. Obviously, the section on the history of Scotland until Edward I of England's invasion is almost identical in both: after a brief overview of the main events until Malcolm III Canmore's reign (1058–93), the narrative turns far more detailed. The dynastic and political disputes cannot be fully comprehended without a clear understanding of what the Norman invasion involved for Scotland: “la frontera geográfica que separa las Tierras Altas de las Tierras Bajas de Escocia se va convirtiendo en una frontera étnica y lingüística. Al oeste de esa línea los habitantes celtas hablan gaélico. Al este, los de origen anglonormando hablan inglés norteno (luego llamado *Scots*) con una fuerte influencia escandinava y después francesa.” (RB, 15) (“The geographical border between the Highlands and the Lowlands gradually becomes an ethnic and linguistic boundary. To the West, the Celtic inhabitants spoke Gaelic. To the east, those of Anglo-Norman ancestry spoke Northern English (known as Scots at a later date), with a strong later Scandinavian and French influence.” A linguist by training and by profession, the references of Toda Iglesia to the languages spoken in Scotland are a most adequate frame to the complex historical situation which led to the events narrated by the poems. It is in this same vein that he explains the languages Robert the Bruce must have known (Anglo-Norman French, because of his paternal ancestry, Scottish Gaelic, because of his mother, surely Northern English—he might have known some Latin, too).

Successive sections in each book deal with the arrivals in Scotland of the Stewart, Wallace and Bruce families (the three of them, Anglo-Norman in origin), William Wallace's resistance against the English invaders, and Robert the Bruce's path to the crown and the independence of the country (not an easy or an unambiguous one, for all that matters). The connection between Wallace and

Bruce as they are shown by the two poets is also thoroughly discussed; Toda (BB, 28) has found no evidence that the historical figures ever met or corresponded, but as far as the literary characters are concerned “Hary necesitaba recoger la historia de Bruce y no dejarlo en mal lugar, entre otras razones porque quien estaba en el trono era uno de sus descendientes . . . En cambio, a Barbour no le interesaba recordar la historia inmediatamente previa al alzamiento de Bruce, la de Wallace” (RB, 29) (“Hary needed to tell Bruce’s story without casting him in a bad light, because, among other reasons, the throne was then occupied by one of his descendants . . . Barbour, on the other hand, had no interest in recounting the history immediately preceding Bruce’s uprising, Wallace’s”).

Fernando Toda has chiefly followed McDiarmid (McDiarmid 1968–69; McDiarmid and Stevenson 1985) in his discussion on what is known about Hary and John Barbour and about the works’ structures and agendas: two Scots, a century between them, much the same fears about Scotland’s independence and, in carefully planned and crafted epics, much the same purposes with two different heroes as pretext: to warn against the possibility of new attacks from England and the frailty of an independence so dearly paid. Neither of them hesitates to alter facts, although Hary, writing approximately 180 years after Wallace’s life, takes more liberties with dates and facts, as shown by McDiarmid’s (1968–69) timeline and analysis of episodes and characters, translated, paraphrased and commented upon by Toda in WW (35–51). Detailed accounts of English and Spanish works derived from both poems close this part of the Introduction: as expected, given their popularity, *Braveheart* (the film and the novel) are thoroughly dealt with: their source (not Hary’s original poem but the modernised eighteenth-century version by William Hamilton of Gilbertfield 1998) and the various liberties and alterations taken by Randall Wallace in them.

These sections and the rest of those following are extremely informative and provide a most reliable guide for those eager to know more. They do so, and this is a major asset of Toda’s work, in a style combining scholarly rigour and clarity of exposition. Every section can be accessed easily not only by philologists, scholars, medievalists, translators, who will enjoy (I did) the most technical parts. But all of them have been structured and exposed in such a clever way that they also work wonderfully as baits to lure the general public into the wealth of knowledge Toda has made available for them here.

And it is in these technical sections that the solid foundations underpinning Toda’s translation work are evidenced, at the same time that they guarantee its excellence and its reliability. When a reader of a translated work is not acquainted with the basics of the source language, that guarantee can only stem from the approach Toda has adopted here: to explain, in every possible detail, all aspects relevant to his task: manuscripts, editions and editors, and among them, those employed for his own work, the glossaries and dictionaries utilized, and, most

interestingly, the detailed rationale behind his choices, for both his renderings and the style adopted.

In this vein, I cannot imagine a translator of medieval texts that does not empathize with Toda, for example, when faced by the problem posed by the different spellings *law/lave* (lines 614–16, Book XX) in the two extant manuscripts of *The Bruce*, both copies of a lost original: Cambridge, St John's College, MS G.23, from the year 1487, and Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Adv.MS 19.2.2.(i). Interestingly, this last witness was once bound in one volume alongside the only surviving manuscript of *The Wallace*,⁵ which is not an original text either. As stated by their respective colophons, both were transcribed by John Ramsay, a prior of the Charterhouse of Perth in 1488 and 1489.

Fernando Toda's translation is based on McDiarmid and Stevenson's (1985) critical edition of the Edinburgh manuscript, with Skeat's (1884) edition of the Cambridge manuscript used for further reference. The discussion on the possible readings of *law/lave* and his final choice (49–51) is a very illustrative example of how he has addressed textual issues; however, my point here concerns his awareness that the choice of either reading does not imply a substantial alteration in the general sense of that particular sentence but, still, he cannot ignore the fact that the meaning is not the same.

The exhaustive information on the textual sources does not merely state the source language: to a linguist's delight, Toda provides a clear explanation of the history of Scots and how the label did not take hold until the end of the fifteenth century. Hary and Barbour never claimed to be writing in anything but *Inglis*—very much like Old English authors, so many centuries before them. Linguistic references are pervasive, both in the running text of the Introduction (the French origin of the Scottish words *menyhe*, *ost* or *battail*—*mesnada*, *hueste* o *batalla*—WW 59, for example) and the footnotes. Toda gradually weaves a sort of web for his readers, so that they never forget that, if individuals are such stuff as dreams are made of, the essence of peoples is such stuff as languages.

I would like to end this review by considering in some detail Toda's argumentations regarding his various translation and stylistic choices, which, for the most part, are similar in both WW and RB. My grammarian self enjoyed the discussions on pronouns—namely third person pronouns⁶ and the distinction between *thou* and *ye*. My translator self would not have adopted different solutions: it is generally assumed that epic poems like these used to reach their audience mostly in performances; changes of voices or intonation would have

⁵ In 1969, the need to repair the volume was detected; after the subsequent examination, the National Library of Scotland, where it was housed, decided to bind the manuscripts separately; the *Bruce* was henceforth known as Adv.MS.19.2.2(i) and the *Wallace*, as Adv.MS.19.2.2(ii).

⁶ At the time, Chaucer still has *hem* for the object case and *her* for the possessive of the third person plural pronoun; but in *Bruce* and *Wallace* the Scandinavian paradigm is complete.

clarified the referents of *he* or *thai*, but a reader often welcomes a proper noun. Besides, the fact that Toda has chosen prose for the bulk of the poems precludes metrical problems when substituting the noun for the pronoun. As to *vos* for *ye*, this is in line with a major choice in stylistic terms, a choice I fully share. After expounding and discussing in detail current and very often conflicting theories regarding the effect a translation should cause on the readers (RB, 52–53), he justifies his own decision and his arguments are convincing: whilst it is obvious that a number of terms must be translated by their medieval equivalents in Spanish (a *mesnada* is not just a group of band of soldiers), syntactic structures or lexical usages could have adopted a more modern shape. Toda has succeeded in something that seems very difficult to me: attaining a balance between intelligibility and interest for a modern audience, without allowing them to forget that the text brings them the words of two medieval poets.

What I have mixed feelings about is the translation of proper nouns, a point upon which Toda has expressed doubts as well. I must admit that to me, “Gualterio Warenne,” for example, sounds stranger than “Juan de Balliol,” but I can understand Toda’s reasons for having opted for Spanish. On the other hand, he is no bad poet at all, as, together with his many findings in conveying rhythm, alliteration, images, etc., his renderings in blank hendecasyllables of the three extracts above mentioned show. He has chosen prose for WW and RB, with the, to me, convincing argument that his translations aim to remain “lo más fiel posible a la totalidad del texto (es una de las razones para preferir la prosa) rehuyendo casi siempre las omisiones, de manera que si se desea usar como ayuda para la lectura del original en muy pocas ocasiones se encontrarán ‘lagunas’” (RB, 55) (“as faithful as possible to the text as a whole (which is one of the reasons for opting for prose), avoiding omissions wherever feasible, so that if somebody wishes to use it as an aid to reading the original, ‘gaps’ will seldom come up”).

In spite of this, no clumsiness of expression leading to boredom will be encountered in these translations. WW and RB can be enjoyed even by those who are sometimes reluctant to approach authentic medieval texts, because Toda’s work in these two volumes excels in how medieval texts must be translated and given to the printers.

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