

BRENNAN ON NIETZSCHE

In *Southerly* No. 4, 1966, the present writer adduced evidence against the view that Brennan had been influenced by Nietzsche; this being to counter a common impression to the contrary. For instance, in the following year, one critic could still write, "When Brennan attempts to pass through the forest of his own life-experience with Nietzsche (not Virgil) for a guide . . ." (Brian Elliott, *The Landscape of Australian Poetry*, pub. Cheshire, 1967). The material used in the 1966 article was essentially based on Brennan's marginal comments in his own copy of the *Novalis Schriften* (edited by Ernst Heilborn and published by Georg Reimer Verlag of Berlin, 1901) and the notebook of one of Brennan's students at the University of Sydney, in 1912.

Through an oversight, a bibliographical reference given by Walter Stone and Hugh Anderson (*Christopher John Brennan, A Comprehensive Bibliography with annotations*, by Walter Stone and Hugh Anderson, published by The Stone Copying Company, 64 Young Street, Cremorne, 1959), was not followed up at the time. The item concerned is an unsigned book-review by Brennan, in the *Australian Magazine*, July 1899. It is entitled: Friedrich Nietzsche, A Genealogy of Morals and Poems, translated by William Haussmann and John Gray. (The spelling, and punctuation, are as in the review.)

As the content of the review, and its dating, are perfectly clear, this item casts valuable light on Brennan's antipathy to Nietzsche. It is not that Brennan may have been attracted, in passing, to Nietzsche's works, as were so many in his time, but that he completely rejected them; from the review of 1899, to the lectures of 1912, to give at least two certain dates.

Since the review itself is not long, and makes good reading, and is good Brennan, it is reproduced here in full.

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FRIEDRICK NIETZSCHE, A GENEALOGY OF MORALS AND POEMS (Translated by William Haussmann and John Gray)

THIS, the third volume in date of the English translation of Nietzsche, is the tenth of the series and was meant by its author to be read in direct sequence after the ninth, entitled "Beyond Good and Evil." Yet even without perusal of the latter, "A Genealogy of Morals" cannot fail to afford the reader enjoyment. Enjoyment, I say, and not profit: for it is a work of fiction, surpassing in passionate interest any novel or any other topsy-turification of history. Undoubtedly there is in the world, as Nietzsche maintains, a master-morality, the simple ethic of those who, being powerful and fortunate, are content to call themselves and their work good. I believe Nietzsche himself allows somewhere that to this spirit there belongs a good piece of stupidity. His talent as fiction-writer is shown not merely in his etymological arguments as to words denoting "good" but in his account of the other morality. This, if you please, is slave-morality, the invention of wretches oppressed, whose dominating feeling of hatred of what is good (their masters), whereas their masters are so filled with love of life and the world and the "good"

that they merely despise the "bad". Now comes the tale, taken up again by Nietzsche, under the shadow of imminent madness, in the "Anti

christ," how these slaves out of hatred of live invented a "beyond" and called the bad good. One especially beaten and oppressed race, the Jews, elaborated this invention and, by a stroke of genius, hatched out of itself the evil brood of Christians, who accomplished the masterpiece of making their lords accept and believe in the new morality. How stupid the lords had to be in order to swallow such a patent lie, the novelist does not exactly explain: but a small blemish on an otherwise perfect romance does not matter. Improbability is, in some degree, a necessary condition of all good fiction.

The translation does not present as many grievous faults as that of the preceding volumes: it fails however to give the reader any true idea of Nietzsche's glittering, leaping style. Mr. John Gray's version of the poems is generally grotesque through over-close adherence to the word of the expression and to the syllable of the irregular rhythm. Another translation is here given of the poem entitled *Venice*:—

On the bridge I stood
of late, as the eve grew brown.
Song came from afar:
a welling of golden drops
pass'd away o'er the trembling wave.
Music, gondolas, lights —
all swam drunkenly out to the dusk . . .

And my soul, like a stringed lyre,
silently, secretly touch'd,
Sand its gondola-Sang,
trembling with many-hued happiness.
Was there any to hear? . . .

Nietzsche had in him the makings of a poet: it is a pity he wasted his imagination in fiction, miscalled philosophy.

Some comments may be useful. Apart from the mis-spelling of Friedrich, there plainly should be a comma after the word 'morals'; the poems are quite separate from "A Genealogy of Morals". The latter was translated by William Hausmann and the former by John Gray.

Brennan does not give the publisher or year but states that the volume is the third in date and the tenth of a series of an English translation. This series must be referred to the abortive attempt to first introduce Nietzsche to the English-speaking world by Dr Alexander Tille, German Lecturer in the University of Glasgow, who, as a "Times" reviewer states (31st July 1898), was already known for his translation of some of Huxley's books into German. The same reviewer states that a well-produced edition of Nietzsche in translation was beginning to appear and was to extend to no less than eleven volumes. The public, however, did not respond, and the series was not completed. The English public, and reviewers, apparently did not even get the 'enjoyment' Brennan refers to. William Haussmann

seems to have been a stalwart Nietzschean, but when the first successful edition, under Oscar Levy, appeared, the "Genealogy of Morals" was translated by another hand.

Brennan's response to Nietzsche in English translation was not much different to that of other reviewers of the day. The "Times" reviewer, referred to, wrote of "Thus Spake Zarathustra" as a "melancholy performance", and Mr Thomas Common, a translator of Nietzsche's works, wrote of the Anglo-Saxon peoples as "silently, sullenly, instinctively" opposed to Nietzschean thought (*The Nation*, 29th March 1906, U.S.A.).

It should be mentioned, however, that contrary voices were raised. For instance, Havelock Ellis contributed a sympathetic article to "The Savoy" as early as 1898 (Vol I, pp. 79-94), and Professor J. G. Robertson, the husband of Henry Handel Richardson, is cited by Mr Common (*ibid.*) as vouching for the importance of Nietzsche's works.

Brennan does not give his grounds for criticising Nietzsche's 'etymological arguments as to words denoting "good"'. This is a pity, since both Nietzsche and Brennan were philologists of no mean order, and we might have been afforded an interesting comparison.

From the latter part of the review, it is clear that Brennan was already familiar with Nietzsche's work in German and was appreciative of his style. He is not here encountering Nietzsche's work for the first time, but has already thought about it. "Zur Genealogie der Moral, Eine Streitschrift" first appeared in 1887, though Brennan may well have formed his views from other of Nietzsche's works.

Brennan's translation of Nietzsche's poem "Venedig" may be worth comment. The poem originally appeared untitled in *Ecce Homo*, 1888, as part of Section 7 of "Warum ich so klug bin" ("Why I am so clever") and was clearly intended to demonstrate Nietzsche's views on music and the South. Nietzsche says that "When I seek for another word for music, I always find the word Venice. I do not know how to distinguish between tears and music . . ." (trans. from *Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche: Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. Karl Schlechta, Hanser Verlag, Munich, 1960-62, Bd.II, S.1092-3). The original text is:

An der Brücke stand
jüngst ich in brauner Nacht.
Fernher kam Gesang;
goldener Tropfen quolls
über die zitternde Fläche weg.
Gondeln, Lichter, Musik –
trunken schwamms in die Dämmerung hinaus . . .

Meine Seele, ein Saitenspiel,
sang sich, unsichtbar berührt,
heimlich ein Gondellied dazu,
zitternd vor bunter Seligkeit.
– Hörte jemand ihr zu? . . .

On comparing this with Brennan's version, one can see what Brennan has in mind by "over-close adherence to the word of the expression." The opposite

evil of course is too great a deviation from "the word of the expression"; and it is on this score that the present writer finds Brennan's version a little insensitive. For instance, the words "Flaeche" (literally, surface) which Brennan translates by "wave", and "Saitenspiel" (a play on strings, as of a musical instrument) which he gives as "stringed lyre" do not seem altogether happy choices. Also, the relative pronoun in the last line of Nietzsche's poem clearly refers to "my soul", rather than to the song itself, a point which I think is important, to give the right emphasis to Nietzsche's feeling, but not properly brought out by Brennan. There are other such hesitations too, over diction, "eve" and "o'er" for instance; but translation is a vexed matter.

At some risk, yet another version, doubtless one of many possible variations, is offered for what perspective it may afford on the matter:

Lately I stood on the bridge
in a brown night.
From afar came song:
golden drops welled away
over the trembling flood.
Gondolas, music, lights –
swam drunkenly out into dusk . . .

My soul, a lute invisibly stirred,
secretly sang to itself,
a gondola-song,
trembling with gay-coloured blessedness.
– Did anyone listen to my soul?

However, there is no doubt on the main point, that Brennan, whatever his sympathy for Nietzsche as a poet, did not respond positively to Nietzsche's views as a whole.

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