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## In a Spirit of Levity

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¶ IN A SPIRIT OF LEVITY...

Perhaps my mother was at fault. Surely my mother must have been at fault, for my father spoiled me and certainly gave me the impression girls were creatures whose every passing whim deserved attention. My mother taught me the very old-fashioned notion that men deserve a regard inconceivable in these days of trousered women jockeying ruthlessly for professional and political prestige.

It was inevitable therefore, that I should respond but tepidly to Tennyson's saccharine

*Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,  
Come hither, the dances are done,  
In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearls...*

yet feel every chord in my heart vibrate to the manly rhythms of Browning's tale of the Italian patriot hunted, betrayed, desperately home-sick. I could appreciate that home-sickness for at the time I made these poets' acquaintance, I was a "colonial" in an English grammar school. I wanted to express my hero-worship for Browning. The teacher, a stout, pleasant, middle-aged woman had just explained the differences in the styles of the two poets. She asked my impressions. I had a fleeting memory of wild orange lilies in some unkempt Canadian field. I rose. In my best high soprano, I stammered:

*"Browning was a lily..."*

My first attempt at interpreting an idea had failed dismally.

Ideas arise from so complex a web of circumstances that exact equivalents cannot be translated in their passing from one mind to another, much less from one language to another. The Portuguese immigrant who addresses his application for permanent admission to "Ilma. Sra. commissãõ de Immigraçãõ" isn't being funny. He has just confused Her Majesty with Her Majesty's Government. He simply cannot conceive of the Canadian Government treating him as an equal but identifies an opportunity to do well in Canada with a kindly, seigneurial concern for his spiritual and material well-being.

The word *comissãõ* being feminine, moreover, he feels he should use the form of polite address due a lady, and the Minister today being a lady, his concept is not so far removed from the truth. Needless to say, many a workman in Canada, born in Portugal or the Azores, can turn out an excellent letter. The example was extreme, and selected to prove a point.

All languages are rich in the common, everyday, garden variety of words but it is those universes of vital spiritual force touching our senses at every point and whirling far beyond reach of our imagination and intellect that refuse definition in any tongue.

Man is a common enough word. It can be translated into Spanish but an *hombre* is not the same as a man. We know the "real tough 'ombre" of the cowboy movies, and we know with what effortless grace Manolete, the greatest of all *torreros* pitted his skill against the rage of his fiercest enemies, against his own ever present awareness of death. This is not, however, the meaning which *hombre* necessarily conveys to the Spanish mind, any more than it is the meaning conveyed to the English mind. "Direct observation", writes Salvador da Madariaga, "will show that the ideal of the Englishman is ethical, social and positive; that of the Spaniard is aesthetical, individual and personal. The Englishman's norm is virtue, the Spaniard's norm is honour" Spanish thought cannot divorce itself from the image of an individual destiny but English thought subordinate the individual to the welfare of the greater number of men. Thus, Englishmen have always served England as a matter of course, because they were English, whereas the Spaniard takes up a cause, throws away his life for anarchism, liberalism, fidelismo, whatever you will, not because he is a Spaniard but because he is *muy hombre*. It might — all in theory of course — be argued that a man proves his manliness in exactly opposite ways depending on whether he speaks English or Spanish. Englishmen returned to fight the Nazis again and again, from downed planes and bombed-out

homes, because it was England, not the Englishman that mattered. The Cuban student who leaves a comfortable bourgeois home and studies to fight in the terrifying jungle of Oriente because his leader, Fidel Castro, is his very ideal of a man and his own honour demands he prove himself a man.

The Dictionary of the Spanish Academy points up this intuitive perception of man's intrinsic worth as man : *Hombre. m. animal racional. hombre de honor. hombre de armas tomar : el que tiene aptitud, resolucion o suficiencia para cualquier cosa; hombre de bigotes, el honrado que cumple puntualmente sus obligaciones; hombre de bigote al ojo, el que ostentaba cierto aire de arrogancia, llevando el bigote retorcido y con la punta al ojo.*

There's the Spaniard for you in a nutshell. The man who meets his obligations not because he should, but because he is a man and because he is a man, he wears a mustache, but when the ends of his mustache tickle his eyebrows, he's a braggart... The Larousse, on the other hand, reveals that fine critical intelligence, matchless, utterly French :

*Homme. m.. celui qui est parvenu à l'âge viril.*

and there the matter ends, no question of flaunting handlebars, no question of flaunting the individuals as a male.. *homme du monde... homme d'armes, autrefois cavalier armé de toutes pièces... homme de lettres...* we have civilised man, made him aware his life is set within a social framework based on reasoning out the needs, the weaknesses, the aspirations of man, the genus, in any one of the many roles he may play

No English clergyman will ask his congregation to "have a heart" though, under stress, he may urge them to "pluck up heart" because he well knows the Englishman must be schooled to master his emotions, master those sentiments that so quickly dominate minds that must be trained to pragmatism. A curé, on the other hand, tries to cure the French of their pride of intellect. "Un homme de coeur est un homme conscient de son devoir envers son prochain" a missionary recently told his following in the Basilique, at Ottawa. Most of the men then had car-keys in their pockets and few had given thought to all the rest, children of God equally, scattered over the planet. The priest did not mean they should become "great-hearted men" though this is the translation Harrap gives for "homme de coeur". The priest wanted to grip those mens' souls with a vision of men everywhere building the city of God. This is the concept underlying French criticism of economic aid to under-developed countries, voiced by Jean Monnet : "L'approche économique ne suffit pas, il s'agit surtout de rapports entre hommes et hommes" (*Le Devoir*, Sept. 8, 1958), and where, but in a Latin society, Catholic, would we find a year-end trade union report described as in the Sept. 15 issue of *Le Devoir* : "A l'ouverture de tous les congrès, le président général présente un rapport moral sur un sujet donné. Cette année, M. Picard faisait son dernier rapport de président général. Il a parlé d'unité syndicale et de liberté syndicale..." We English, consider trade-union meetings very business-like affairs, even though we expect them to lay down general principles of political behaviour and principle.

It is with such idle reflections I waste my time, as I watch the politicians making their way into the Parliament Buildings, passing beneath the Peace Tower to take their places in Commons.

Josephine HAMBLETON, Ottawa.



# Enfin une Méthode de Traduction !

## STYLISTIQUE COMPARÉE DU FRANÇAIS ET DE L'ANGLAIS

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