

TRANSLATION, INTERPRETATION AND CONGENIALITY:  
RALPH WALDO EMERSON IN THE WORK  
OF MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO

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All the signs seem to indicate that there was no Spanish edition of the works of Emerson before 1900. It does seem however that before this date, Emerson, who died in 1882, was known to some scholars and intellectuals familiar with English Literature in the general sense of the term, either directly or through a French translation of his *Essays*.

This situation changed radically at the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1900 seven of his essays appeared - "the Over-Soul," "Circles," "Compensation," "Self Reliance," "Friendship," "Heroism," "The Poet" - in a volume entitled *El hombre y el mundo*, in translation by Pedro Márquez<sup>1</sup>.

In that same year, 1900 the whole of the work *The Conduct of Life* appeared in translation under the title *La ley de la vida*, by Benedicto Martínez Vélez<sup>2</sup>. This latter translation was followed by another of *Representative Men*. Unfortunately, none of the volumes is dated and therefore we do not know exactly when each was published nor the interval of time that separates their respective appearances. The translation was entitled *Hombres simbólicos*, a work by David Martínez Vélez, presumably brother of the translator of *The Conduct of Life*<sup>3</sup>. Both *La ley de la vida* and *Hombres simbólicos* form volumes 326 and 332 of the "Biblioteca de Jurisprudencia, Filosofía e Historia", a collection which includes numerous translations of works, considered classics, from all languages.

Around 1904, *Nature*, "The American Scholar", "The Divinity School Address", "Literary Ethics", "The Method of Nature", "Man the Reformer", and

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1 *El hombre y el mundo*, por Emerson, traducción del inglés por Pedro Márquez, B. Rodríguez Serra, editor, Madrid, 1900. Biblioteca de Filosofía y Sociología, vol. IV.

2 *La ley de la vida* por R. W. Emerson, traducción de Benedicto Martínez Vélez, Doctor en Filosofía y Letras, La España Moderna, Madrid, 1900. Biblioteca de Jurisprudencia, Filosofía e Historia, vol. 326.

3 *Hombres simbólicos*, por R. W. Emerson: traducido por David Martínez Vélez, Doctor en Sagrada Teología y en Filosofía y Letras, La España Moderna, Madrid, 1904. Biblioteca de Jurisprudencia, Filosofía e Historia, vol. 332.

"The Young American" were translated into Spanish by Edmundo González-Blanco, a noted critic and man of letters<sup>4</sup>.

*English Traits* was translated into Spanish under the title *Inglaterra y el carácter inglés*, by Rafael Cansinos Assens, also forming part of the series "Biblioteca de Jurisprudencia, Filosofía e Historia", volume 442<sup>5</sup>. In this same collection, as volume 459, translated as *Los veinte ensayos*, by Siro García, appeared the essays which make up the first and second series of the *Essays*, with the exception of "The New England Reformer"<sup>6</sup>.

Apart from this notable group of translations, in 1904 some essays were published in Barcelona, with the title *Siete ensayos*, and with a preface which is a famous study of Emerson's work, by Maeterlinck<sup>7</sup>.

In 1904 and 1910 the translation of "Friendship" and "Self-Reliance", was published in Barcelona by the Catalan author, poet and critic Cebriá Montoliu. The work is entitled *La confiança en si mateix. L'amistat*. The twenty-page introduction of the author to this translation is noteworthy<sup>8</sup>.

Bearing in mind the volume of translations of Emerson, it is surprising to note that the critical production on the work of this great American remains small. It is all the more extraordinary when we note that, of the limited quantity of literary studies on Emerson, the greater part precede the versions we have just outlined. And of the translations taken as a whole only that of Cebriá Montoliu has an original critical introduction<sup>9</sup>.

The most significant of the first critical studies on Emerson is to be found in the essays of Juan Valera, novelist and critic, who for some time was Ambassador in Washington.

All his references to Emerson reveal his obsessive interest in the loans which the latter received from Carlyle. We have a clear example of this in his essay on "Originalidad y plagio", in which amongst other things, he says:

4 The translation by Edmundo González-Blanco was collected in the series Biblioteca de Jurisprudencia, Filosofía e Historia, vol. 413.

5 *Inglaterra y el carácter inglés*, por R.W. Emerson, traducción por Rafael Cansinos Assens, La España Moderna, Madrid, 1906. Biblioteca de Jurisprudencia, Filosofía e Historia, vol. 442.

6 *Los veinte ensayos* por R.W. Emerson, versión castellana de Siro García, La España Moderna, Madrid, 1907. Biblioteca de Jurisprudencia, Filosofía e Historia, vol. 459.

7 *Siete ensayos*, por R.W. Emerson, con un prólogo de Mauricio Maeterlinck, traducidos de la última edición inglesa por Pedro Umbert, Imprenta de Heinrich y Cía, Barcelona, 1904. Biblioteca sociológica internacional.

8 R.W. Emerson. *La confiança en si mateix. L'amistat*, traducció de l'inglés amb una introducció per Cebriá Montoliu, Segona edició, Biblioteca popular de "L'Avenç," Barcelona, 1910. (The introduction comprises pages 5-27).

9 Note that the preface by Maeterlinck, before appearing in the Spanish edition published in Barcelona, had already composed the French edition of Mile. Mali.

Entre la obras de Emerson hay una llamada *Representative Men*, que es las epifanías, encarnaciones, hipóstasis, o como quiera llamarse, del (...) Superalma. Esta obra sobre *Representative Men* en cierto modo se asemeja a una de Carlyle llamada *Hero-Worship*. En resumen, sin profundizar demasiado, y dejando a un lado las filosofías complejas de estos autores, es evidente que ambos deifican varios individuos de una manera rimbombante.

Emerson, supongo que arbitrariamente o más bien atraído por la virtud cabalística del número siete, designa siete hombres simbólicos, como si fueran siete arcángeles, y siete virtudes, y siete pecados mortales, y siete hermanos mártires en muchos martirologios. Los siete hombres simbólicos de Emerson son: el filósofo, Platón; el místico, Swedenborg; el escéptico, Montaigne; el hombre de mundo, Napoleón; el escritor, Goethe; y el poeta, Shakespeare. Está claro que no menos arbitraria que la división en siete tipos es la elección de los individuos para cada uno de los siete tipos. De la misma manera podríamos hacer otro libro, poniendo a Aristóteles para el filósofo; San Juan de la Cruz para el místico; Sánchez para el escéptico; Alejandro Magno o Colón para el hombre de acción o del mundo; para el escritor, Cervantes y para el poeta, Dante, Calderón o Lope<sup>10</sup>.

Valera's other essays also contain references to Emerson, for ever reminding us that he imitated Carlyle. Thus, in "Los Estados Unidos contra España", written in 1896, when relations between the two countries were passing through a bad spell he points out:

No puedo excluir de mi aprecio por el género humano a la gente de Estados Unidos; (...) pensadores quizás poco originales, pero discretos e ingeniosos, como Emerson, el imitador de Carlyle<sup>11</sup>.

The same idea of Carlyle's influence on Emerson is to be found in Menéndez Pelayo's essay "La historia como obra de arte".

We only know of one study of a Spanish version of Emerson's work. And in this case one cannot help suspecting that its motives were commercial ones, given that the book in question and the journal which published the review were the property of the same editorial. The book review is one of a collection which includes the first and second parts of the *Essays, Los veinte ensayos*<sup>12</sup>. The critic is Carlos Belmonte. The following paragraph is the most interesting of the review:

Emerson, el escritor contemporáneo más original acaso, el más poético, brillante y paradójico que conocemos, entre cuyos imitadores descuella nuestro seductor é inquieto Unamuno, es famoso

10 See Juan Valera, "Originalidad y Plagio," in *Disertaciones y juicios literarios*, Madrid, 1890. The essay was first published in *Revista contemporánea* in 1876.

11 See Juan Valera, "Los Estados Unidos contra España", in *A vuela pluma*, Madrid, 1897. Valera also quotes Emerson in his *Apuntes sobre el nuevo arte de escribir novelas* and in the essay "Sobre Shakespeare"; cfr. Juan Valera, *Obras*, Madrid, 1988, vol. III, pp. 228, 236, 239.

12 See note 6.

principalmente por sus *Ensayos*, algunos de los cuales, como *Confianza en sí mismo* y el *Ensayo sobre la Naturaleza* son obras maestras del lenguaje y pensamiento.

Nos basta, por tanto, anunciar la aparición de sus veinte *Ensayos*, renunciando á hacer elogios, que serían innecesarios<sup>13</sup>.

From the quote above, the name of Miguel de Unamuno then Rector of Salamanca University deserves to be mentioned. We recall that in 1906 the date when Belmonte reviewed *Los veinte ensayos*, various Spanish editions of Emerson's essays had been published. And if we take year 1910 as a point of reference, the nine editions published between 1900 and this latter date deserve to be mentioned.

It can be proved that Unamuno knew the works of Emerson; although Belmonte, in our view, goes too far when he labels the Rector of Salamanca "imitator" of the American writer. The clearest proof of D. Miguel's familiarity with Emerson's work may be found in his private library in Salamanca, where we find American editions of the following works: *English Traits*, *Representative Men*, *Poems* and *Essays*<sup>14</sup>, in addition to the translation of Cebriá Montoliu, *La Confiança en si mateix. L'amistat*, which includes a dedicatory note from the author to the Salamantine Professor.

But if we insist on the presence of Emerson in Unamuno's work, we must necessarily divide it into two parts. On the one hand there should appear the textual quotes which D. Miguel makes from the American author, and on the other, the congeniality which in our opinion existed between the characters of both. In connection with the quotations, Unamuno refers to Emerson in his essays on two occasions:

Ya dijo entre otros, Emerson, que 'es fácil vivir en el mundo según la opinión del mundo, y fácil vivir en la soledad según la nuestra, pero el hombre grande es el que en medio de la muchedumbre mantiene con perfecta mansedumbre la independencia de la soledad'<sup>15</sup>.

The source of this paragraph remains unknown. Emerson includes these words, for the first time, in his diary on the 22nd of December 1834<sup>16</sup>. But in 1904 the Emerson diaries were still unpublished, when Unamuno publishes "Sobre la soberbia", an essay to which the previous paragraph belongs. It seems likely that Unamuno drew the lines from one or other of Emerson's essays, bearing in mind that the diaries of the author of Concord were a kind of storehouse of ideas which he would subsequently express in his lectures or develop in his essays or poems. The second allusion, in the essay "Sobre la

13 Carlos Belmonte, *La España Moderna*, Año XIX (agosto, 1907), no. 224, p. 202.

14 All published by Hurstand Co., New York. Date of publication not given.

15 Miguel de Unamuno, *Ensayos*, 2 vols., Aguilar, S.A., Madrid, 1951, vol. I, p. 624.

16 See *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 10 vols., ed. E.W. Emerson and W.E. Forbes, Boston, 1909-1914, vol. IV, p. 401.

consecuencia, la sinceridad", is a quotation from the final part of "Self-reliance":

Supón que tengas que contradecirte. ¿Y qué? Parece ser regla de sabiduría que jamás te apoyes en tu memoria, sino que traigas el pasado a tu juicio ante el presente de mil ojos, y vivas siempre en un nuevo día (...). Una necia consecuencia es el fantasma de los espíritus estrechos, adorada por los pequeños estadistas, los filósofos y los teólogos. Un alma grande sencillamente no tiene nada que hacer con la consecuencia<sup>17</sup>.

If we compare this paragraph with the original version, Unamuno is plainly making a free composition of Emerson's passage<sup>18</sup>. The question arises: Does D. Miguel translate Emerson freely? Let us remember that his library contains part of the literary production of the American; or is there indeed a close affinity between both authors? To affirm one or other view would be to speculate. But these similitudes may be seen in a whole host of texts. To this end we will bear in mind the works of Emerson which Unamuno's library contains.

The Rector of Salamanca says in one of his essays:

Y ser perfecto es serlo todo, es ser yo y ser todo lo demás, es ser Humanidad, es ser Universo. Y no hay otro camino para ser todo lo demás sino darse a todo, y cuando todo sea en todo, todo será en cada uno de nosotros<sup>19</sup>.

We may well wonder if it is possible to "serlo todo". What is Unamuno's intention when he proposes such an irrationality? There is no more forceful way of describing the intimate relation between the self and the divinity. With love as the foundation and in contrast with his concept of each person as an "especie única", it remains one of Unamuno's most equable interpretations on the essential unity of everything, a concept which stands among the predilections of Emerson:

Love reduces (inequities) as the sun melts the iceberg in the sea. The heart and the soul of all men being one, this bitterness of *His* and *Mine* ceases (...) Jesus and Shakespeare are fragments of the soul, and by love I conquer and incorporate them in my own conscious domain. His virtue, -is not that mine? His wit, -if it cannot be made mine, is not wit<sup>20</sup>.

The all embracing tendency to "serlo todo" of the self is more completely expressed in the following words of Emerson:

17 Miguel de Unamuno, "Sobre la consecuencia, la sinceridad", *Ensayos*, ed. cit., vol. I, p. 852.

18 Cfr. *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, 12 vols., Boston, 1903-1904, vol. II, p. 57.

19 Miguel de Unamuno, *Ensayos*, ed. cit., vol. II, p. 981.

20 *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. cit., vol. II, p. 124.

Being is the vast affirmative, excluding negation, self-balanced, and swallowing up the relations, - parts and times within itself<sup>21</sup>.

For both authors, the individual soul seeks a common identity in the "Todo". Supreme identity is the state of the self when it is an "Over-Soul" or an "Uno" in whose power every soul shares and which he classifies in various ways: *Conciencia del Universo, el todo, Conciencia Suprema, Gran Conciencia Total, Alma Universal, Conciencia Universal, Mente Universal*<sup>22</sup>. Every human being belongs to the system:

Fantasia (quíerese decir especulación) que se ha producido más de una vez en la historia del sentimiento humano, al suponer alguien, filósofo o poeta, que somos los hombres a modo de glóbulos de la sangre de un Ser Supremo; que tiene conciencia colectiva, la Conciencia del Universo<sup>23</sup>.

The image "glóbulos de la sangre de un ser Supremo" is a total synthesis of the Emersonian idea of the Over-Soul, the indissolubility between God and man:

Y este Dios, el Dios vivo, tu Dios, nuestro Dios, está en mí, está en tí, vive en nosotros, y nosotros vivimos, nos movemos, y somos en El<sup>24</sup>.

We can even sacrifice:

...nuestra personalidad si supiéramos que al morir iba a enriquecer una Personalidad, una Conciencia Suprema; si supiéramos que el Alma Universal se alimenta de nuestras almas y de ellas necesita<sup>25</sup>.

This provisional sacrifice is worth making when we bear in mind that "religión no es anhelo de aniquilarse, sino de totalizarse"<sup>26</sup>.

Years after writing "Self-Reliance" Emerson said: "Self-Reliance, the height and perfection of man, is reliance on God"<sup>27</sup>. Similarly, Unamuno would admit that a man without God had no meaning. Such is the coincidence of ideas between the Professor of Salamanca and the American Transcendentalist. It gives the impression that D. Miguel is translating, very freely, ideas which he too shares:

21 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 121

22 Miguel de Unamuno, *El sentimiento trágico de la vida*, chapters VII, VIII and IX.

23 Miguel de Unamuno, *Ensayos*, ed. cit., vol. II, p. 863.

24 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 889.

25 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 894.

26 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 926.

27 *The Complete Works of Ralf Waldo Emerson*, ed. cit., vol. XI, p. 236.

...la razón, la cabeza nos dice: '¡Nada!', la imaginación, el corazón nos dice: '¡Todo!' y entre nada y todo, fundiéndose el todo y la nada en nosotros, vivimos en Dios, que es todo, y vive Dios en nosotros que sin El somos nada<sup>28</sup>.

From the paragraph in which Unamuno reveals to us how close a copyist and translator of the Emersonian idea of the Over-Soul he is, the following passage is ample proof:

Y tampoco puede extrañar que se diga que esa conciencia del Universo esté compuesta e integrada por las conciencias de los seres todos, y sea, sin embargo, una conciencia personal distinta de las que la componen. Sólo así se comprende lo que en Dios seamos, nos movamos y vivamos<sup>29</sup>.

One of the clearest definitions of the Over-Soul made by Emerson in his essays is of central importance to and narrowly related to the paragraph above of D. Miguel. Once again, the doubt is raised about the kind of activity exercised by Unamuno: Is it translation, interpretation or congeniality? Let us see:

We live in succession, in division, in parts, in particles. Meantime within man is the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the Eternal One<sup>30</sup>.

Taking into account the great parallelisms that exist between Emerson and Unamuno, once established that some of the Emersonian books in D. Miguel's library are underlined and annotated in their margins, though not all of them, it is appropriate to recall the words of Professor García Blanco in relation to the annotations Unamuno made; in connection with the *Poems* and *Essays*:

... es indudable que Unamuno leyó mucho, sobre todos los segundos, y esa falta de información se debe a que alternando con el sistema de anotaciones en el propio texto solía emplear el de utilizar una cuartilla u hoja pequeña de papel para anotar lo que le interesaba<sup>31</sup>.

If we consider the annotations made in pencil in the work *English Traits*, we can observe amongst others the references to Américo Vespucci. In the *Essays* only the title "Self-Reliance" is underlined. It is right to think about, though plainly we cannot know the nature of, the notes taken by Unamuno. Nevertheless, we have a need of the work by Cebriá Montoliu, which,

28 Miguel de Unamuno, *Ensayos*, ed. cit., vol II, p. 890

29 *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 867.

30 *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. cit., vol. II, p. 267.

31 Letter from D. Manuel García Blanco to Peter G. Earle. Courtesy of the latter.

though not underlined or annotated boasts an introduction which might have been of use to Unamuno. The essay "Self-Reliance", included in the translation by the Catalan author, is, as we have seen, one to which Unamuno has most recourse. Not in vain can we affirm that he relied on the original version, the introduction by Cebriá, and the translation of the latter. Moreover, the hypothesis to Unamuno's notes might run: translation of paragraphs? Adaptation into Spanish of the Catalan translation by Cebriá Montoliu? Interpretation of the first or of the second?

Cebriá Montoliu published numerous works in Spanish and Catalan. He wanted to establish the latter as a literary language. With this end in mind he set about translating important works of literature into Catalan.

In his introduction to the translation of "Self-Reliance" and "Friendship", collected in *La confiança en si mateix. L'amistat*<sup>32</sup>, Montoliu begins it with a general discussion about the intellectual leaders amongst whom the names of Marcus Aurelius, Montaigne, Pascal and Emerson stand out. He goes on to present a commentary on the life of Emerson while providing a compendium of his most important works all dated. This is followed by an analysis of the two essays he has elected to translate: "Self-Reliance" and "Friendship", in which he points out the radical and absolute nature of Emerson's individualism as well as the iron independence of his Anglo-Saxon soul<sup>33</sup>.

The exercise of the translation serves to shed light on certain key points which we can paraphrase from the Catalan translation.

The Catalan author points out that as regards translation, it must be said in its defence and in that of other translators that Emerson is considered "Untranslatable" in his own country, owing to the identification of his style with the most intimate nature of the Anglo-American spirit. Perhaps this reason, continues Cebriá, accounts for the limited success his translations have had particularly those made from the Romance languages, as compared with the popularity of his works in his country. From the literary point of view Emerson's style represents the highest stage in the evolution of an essential attribute of the English Language: concision. Emerson is so exceptional a writer, that the Catalan translator doubts whether more praiseworthy examples of this quality of language are to be found in literature. Herein according to Cebriá lies the greatest difficulty for translation. Because this concision, when it is not artificial or superficial, but the natural expression of the soul of the author and his language, must be respected on penalty of losing the main charm of the language. On the other hand, which language is capable of equalling the discursive power of the English employed by Emerson? For Montoliu, no other. Nevertheless, he does reveal him partially and tells us that if any such language does exist, the one that can best at-

32 See note 8.

33 In all references to the Introduction by Cebriá Montoliu of his work *La confiança en si mateix. L'amistat*, ed. cit., see pp. 5 to 27.



tempt it is the Catalan. And he cites this as his reason, still aware of the great difficulties of the undertaking, for his decision to avoid the system followed by the majority of translators.

Clearly, Cebriá Montoliu was not in agreement with the translation methods followed by his colleagues in the field of Romance languages. Various Spanish translations of Emerson had already appeared when he set about producing his own in 1904.

Out of courtesy, possibly, Montoliu does not direct his attacks at the Spanish translations, but at one which was their very reference point. He invites us to reflect on the translation of the *Essays* by I. Will<sup>34</sup>. Her edition contained, by way of introduction, the essay by Maeterlinck. Curiously, the prologue of this critic figures in the Spanish translation by Pedro Umbert<sup>35</sup>. The above-mentioned French edition, Montoliu says, served as a model for translations made in Spain, and he denounces its excessive verbosity. In his opinion, it must be considered no more than a commentary or paraphrase of the original, nor is it a happy one. The Catalan author concludes by acknowledging that in his aim of remaining faithful to the original he suffers from being too literal and the result is an obscure translation. By way of vindication he proves that Emerson is frequently obscure and that he has preferred to respect this obscurity rather than give gratuitous explanations; although he does not willingly omit his own observations having recourse to numerous notes. In these he outlines the difficulties he had to overcome in translating such words as *self*, which are without an equivalent in Catalan.

In view of this, it is hardly surprising that Unamuno, alerted by Montoliu's introduction, and aware of the implicit difficulty in a calque translation, should discard not only the translation formulated by the Catalan translator, but also the remaining editions discredited by Montoliu, as we have already seen. It is on these premises that D. Miguel begins his reading of the works of Emerson, drawing out the structure of an idea and then flashing out its meaning where appropriate.

This is the case when a feeling of transcendental need manifests itself in the disquiet, in the "temporal" restlessness of Unamuno's interior life. The closing thoughts of *Paz en la guerra* address the "resignación trascendente y eterna" "madre de la irresignación temporal, del no contentarse jamás aquí abajo". Serenity borne of the mystic union only comes after a long purgation. Unamuno seems to be following closely indeed, almost translating, the words of Emerson:

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34 I. Will was the pseudonym adopted by Mlle. Mali, translator into French of the works of Emerson. See *Sept Essais d'Emerson*, par I. Will, avec un préface de Maurice Maeterlinck, Lacomblez, Bruxelles, 1894.

35 See note 7.

This (mystic) path is difficult, secret and beset with terror. The ancients called it *ecstasy* or absence, a getting out of their bodies to think<sup>36</sup>.

We may conclude by saying that Unamuno interprets Emerson and translates him most freely. But over and above this double initiative, there does exist between a congeniality albeit enigmatic and elusive. Emerson, referring to the fusion on the individual in the total essence, with the aspiration of achieving a higher plane of existence, says on his diary:

I believe I shall some time cease to be an individual, that the eternal tendency of the soul is to become Universal, to animate the last extremities of organization<sup>37</sup>.

Unamuno, in 1899, when the Emerson diaries had still to be published, through a close affinity of character and congeniality of spirit, seems to be adopting metaphorically the words of Emerson in these lines:

Canta cigarra, canta sin descanso.  
 Une tu voz monótona y sencilla  
 al coro universal hondo y solemne....  
 Déjala sin pensar que en él se pierda  
 como en el mar inmenso gota leve.  
 Déjala porque es vida soberana.  
 Es más profundo ser el de esa muerte;  
 y así el amor universal y eterno  
 confluirá en el amor<sup>38</sup>.

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36 *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. cit., vol. IV, p. 97.

37 *The journals*, ed. cit., vol. IV, p. 287.

38 M. García Blanco, *Don Miguel de Unamuno y sus poesías*, Salamanca, 1954, p. 22.