

SLATER, Candace. *This Earth, That Sky: Poems by Manuel Bandeira.* English translation, with Notes and Introduction. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989. 247p.

At last a book on Manuel Bandeira's poetry is available to the English reader. This bilingual anthology is indeed overdue, for Bandeira, undoubtedly both a "national monument" and a "Brazilian Everyman to many of his readers" (p. 6), deserves a larger reading public. *This Earth, That Sky* includes a Preface, an Introduction, a Translator's Note, and a selected number of translations from each of the poet's books. Professor Slater concentrates on the poems published between 1930 and 1966, but she also offers samples of Bandeira's early works. Some other poems were excluded, according to Professor Slater, because of their "untranslatability". The book also has an extensive, up-to-date bibliography of critical works on Bandeira.

As the book's title – *This Earth, That Sky* – suggests, both the Introduction and the translations are premised on the categories of "transcendental" and "non-transcendental". From the beginning Professor Slater points out that Bandeira's work is extremely diverse, and therefore, hard to categorize (p. 6). So, why do it? Her own division becomes problematic when Bandeira's "fundamental tension" comes under several "subject headings" such as: "Poems about nature", "Poems about Men and Women", "Poems about Art and the Artist", "Poems utilizing Religious Imagery", and "Poems about Time and Mortality".

Professor Slater states that her discussion intends a "less thematic: analysis than confirmation of an underlying dynamic

that the reader can set against the corpus as a whole". (p. 7) While the main opposition transcendence/non-transcendence, as well as the subsequent thematic categorization is well-meaning, an unintended consequence is that they are unnecessarily reductive. Both the poems "The Star and the Angel" ("A Estrela e o Anjo") and "I Saw a Rose" ("Eu vi uma Rosa") deal with nature as much as they deal with a "feminine" cosmic power, and yet, according to Professor Slater's division, the first is supposed to be "about Nature" and the second on "Everyday Themes". These poems, together with others such as "Little Erotic Poem" ("Poemeto Erótico") [in *Ash of the Hours*] and "Apple" ("Maçã") [in *Lyre of Fifty Years*] are thematically complex, and cosmically interweave woman, life and the poem itself, within Bandeira's symbolistic/modernistic oscillations.

Another good example of the problem caused by Professor Slater's classification is the poem "Union" ("Unidade"). According to Professor Slater, it is about a "reintegration of self through sexual intercourse", (p. 12) showing a "transitory wholeness" (p. 12) achieved by the poem itself as representing a "unity". The poem triggers a very modern sense of duplicity between an erotic marriage and a poetic coupling, and therefore it could as easily be included under the heading "Poems about Art and the Artist" or as "about Men and Women". Professor Slater's subject headings undermine the scope of Bandeira's poems and their mediation between different realities.

The discussion in the Introduction, also premised on this categorization, is misleading. The need for this structure appears to be based on her perception of the audience for this book. But, who is her reader? Is the book directed to the American college student, to the reader of poetry, or to the person interested in Brazilian culture in general? In any of these cases, it seems, the book misses its target, either by underestimating or by overestimating the reader's analytical capabilities.

In the Translator's Note, Professor Slater is conscientiously aware that, according to Bandeira, "the translator should identify and strive to recreate the most important aspect of the poem" (p. 32) although, in the "gymnastics of translation" (also Bandeira's term) the "pungent, elusive tenderness that is a hallmark of the corpus does not always come across" (p. 32). This justifies the translation of the title "Consoada" as "Late Supper" and, in the

same poem "Indesejada das gentes" as "Uninvited one", referring to death as an uninvited guest. But still, in the same poem, one could argue that "ineludível" is not the same as "inescapable" and maybe a solution would instead be "unequivocal", so that the meaning, as well as some of the poem's musicality would not be totally lost. It is hard to carry cultural reverberations through any translation. Nevertheless, Professor Slater could have shown more sensitivity to the music of Bandeira's poems.

A minimization of Bandeira, in his poems, can reduce him, sometimes, to a caricature of himself. The poem "Bonheur Lyrique", for instance, is seen as a result of a "privileged character of art", "as the property of a spiritual elite", "where the poet compares himself to the poor child who creates a solitary fantasy" (p. 17-18). It is a poem written in French, and the line "Il faut que tu te fabriques" ("You must create") is not adequately translated, for it implies a "self-fabrication" of a "lyric heart", a self-consciously poetic duplicate feeling of the poor child's fantasy. Obviously, the poet's fabrication is, by comparison, the poor one. Less obviously, Bandeira calls attention to the creative act as a "bonheur lyrique" which is a "fabrication", his own life becoming representative of the Poet's life, an artistic testimony to the man's "consumptive heart". "Bonheur Lyrique", as well as "New Poetics" ("Nova Poética"), are not only poems "about" Art and the Artist, which show a critical distance between the poet and the man, but are also the creative act as a symbol of transition, a "poetics" per se, as the poems produce a new poetic vision.

The reduction of Bandeira's poetic complexity results in an over-simplification of his vocabulary: the adjective "sórdido", recurrent in the original poems, is invariably translated as "vile". Similarly, the rich variety of adjectives for "beauty", in the Portuguese "lindas", "bonito" and "belo", is also flatly substituted, if not redundantly simplified, with the word "lovely".

There is no doubt that Professor Slater has filled a glaring lacuna in the introduction of Bandeira to English speakers. She has also literally satisfied the poet's desire to be translated, but, perhaps the translation is too literal. As some of the recent criticism in Professor Slater's bibliography suggests, Bandeira

is a larger, more significant, more contemporary poet than has been recognized. My quarrel with the book is precisely this: the poet is presented in silhouette rather than in the richness and sparkle of all his dimensions.

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