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# Literature Abroad

By ERNEST BOYD

IN "South Wind" Norman Douglas set down with delightful humor the strange chronicle of the exiles, eccentric and otherwise, who have made Capri their geographical and their spiritual home. Now that book has an Italian counter-part entitled "Aria di Capri" (Naples: Casella), which is signed by a name hitherto unencountered in my diligent reading of all things Italian, Edwin Cerio. It looks to me very much like a pen-name, and my suspicions are confirmed by the un-Mediterranean flavor of the Christian name, and the fact that the surname, when pronounced, approximates remarkably to "Cheerio!" If I were to hear that Norman Douglas himself had a hand in it, and that "Cheerio-Cerio" is a pseudonym covering a collaboration of which he is part, I should not be surprised.

In case there are readers anxious to expose my ignorance and claim personal knowledge of the estimable Edwin Cerio, I hasten to say that the question of the authenticity of this signature is merely idle and amused speculation, so far as I am concerned, for the book itself stands squarely upon its intrinsic interest and the droll humor of its style. Imagine "South Wind" in the form of a series of sketches, thirteen being "Men" and fifteen being "Things." The former are biographical and personal impressions of different eccentrics of genius who have added to the gaieties of life in Capri; the latter are stories of various unusual incidents in which those, or other, eccentrics were involved. Add the two together and "South Wind" is the result, with a little left over for a volume like "Siren Land." Edwin Cerio writes about these people apparently without fictitious names: "August Weber: Lunar Myth," "Oscar Westergaard: Solar Myth," "Miradois: the German Christ," "Bludoir: the Interim Christ," "Emilio Gilardi: the Fifth Evangelist," "Norman Douglas: Sirenologist."

I quote some of the chapters on "Men," although most of the people are known, I imagine, only to visitors to Capri, because the accounts of them differ in no respect from the accounts of Marinetti and Norman Douglas, whose existence is vouchsafed for by other witnesses than Edwin Cerio. It happens that no preliminary acquaintance with any of the gentlemen is necessary to the understanding and enjoyment of what is here related concerning them. Be they real or imaginary portraits, they constitute a collection of individuals as curious as any who marched through the pages of "Nightmare Abbey" or "Headlong Hall." The secret of the peculiar charm of Capri is revealed, and the why and the wherefore of Norman Douglas are no longer a mystery. Where else, if not in Capri, could he live; where find his inspiration? Let Edwin Cerio speak:

"Siren Land" is the only British possession which has been annexed to the Empire by right of spiritual occupation. . . . The English in Capri are dedicated to the export of Sirens, a southern marine product. They have installed on the island a breeding ground for the only mythological animal upon which their imagination can feed. The English intellectuals are sirenophagous gluttons, with a special liking for the Mediterranean variety of that charming amphibian, in which they do an active trade. . . . Sirens, which are born here spontaneously, by parthogenesis, are not found in England, and all attempts to acclimatize them on the shores of Britain have failed. Even the greatest attempt of this kind failed, "The Sea Lady" of H. G. Wells.

Having described how Norman Douglas came to write "South Wind," "Siren Land," and "Old Calabria," Edwin Cerio is led to an enumeration of "England's intellectual forces in the Mediterranean." Compton Mackenzie, Francis Brett Young, D. H. Lawrence, Rebecca West, and Hugh Walpole. These are a few of the writers who have from time to time been stationed in the waters of Capri, a squadron of powerful cruisers attached to the heavy battleships of the metropolitan literary fleet; Wells and Shaw, of established fame; J. D. Beresford, E. M. Delafield, Katherine E. Mansfield, Frank Swinnerton, Romer Wilson, James Joyce, Stella Benson, St. John Ervine, Aldous Huxley, Wyndham Lewis. . . . Amongst all these people Norman Douglas is an entity apart. . . . But for Douglas Capri would have become a refuge for respectable people, a pathway of virtue, a sink emptied of its iniquities.

Douglas is the professional of imaginary sin. As an anonymous poet says:

*Was there a sin Tiberius committed*

*Which might one moment find N. D. outwitted?*

*No, cry the rocks and the reverberate caves,  
No, from their tombs proclaim a myriad slaves.*

Edwin Cerio, like many another admirer, tried to extract from Norman Douglas some biographical facts. The answer received was: "The only more or less respectable event in my life was my birth. The rest is not fit for publication." Nevertheless, he contrives to give an outline of the history of this "celebrated pantheistic explorer." First he entered the diplomatic service, and was secretary at Petrograd, but "owing to insubordination on the part of his superior, the Ambassador," he left the Foreign Office and went to India to write a report on imperial tariffs. Encouraged by this, and having learned from Darwin that there are no toads on volcanic islands, he proceeded to the volcanic island of Lipari, discovered a toad, and presented it to the South Kensington Museum. Whenever he heard that an animal was unknown in a certain place, he would go to that place and inevitably produce the animal aforesaid. On the island of Stymalos in Greece he found a frog that ought never to have been there; in the Orkneys some snail, and in the lake of Saima, in Finland, "a rare, or rather a unique sea-lion, which ought not to have been in the lake of Saima."

After such a training Norman Douglas was "ripe for Capri," and the account of his doings there follows in a mock-serious vein which is highly entertaining: he wrote monographs on the flora and fauna of the island—"as soon as there was a subject in which nobody was interested, about which any work was bound to be a commercial failure, Douglas studied it thoroughly and wrote a monograph on it—discovered Siren Land, and gradually emerged as the author in whom so many of us delight.

The other sketches are also written in this semi-serious style. August Weber, the German artist, on first beholding the sea which separated him from Capri could not see how he could get there without a boat, so he bought one for forty lire and, after various maritime adventures, landed triumphantly on its enchanted shores, oblivious of the regular steamer service which would have saved him his few remaining coins. Gustave Julius, Friedrich, Otto Döbrich, alias Miradois, carries his rucksack, his pilgrim's staff, and his baby and milkbottle, because a suckling child should be taken from its mother after six weeks, and by the time its teeth have grown, the mother should have another baby. Also it is his business to teach theosophy, Christian humility, and the new pan-German doctrine of expiation. Marinetti made the mistake of postponing his visit to Capri until after he was celebrated. Fame in Capri is local and peculiar, and the island is jealous of its prerogatives. To Edwin Cerio it should be for ever grateful for one of the most diverting books ever written about genial eccentrics.

## French Poets

MODERN FRENCH POETRY, AN ANTHOLOGY. Compiled and translated by JOSEPH T. SHIPLEY. Greenberg, 1926. \$3.

Reviewed by FREDERICK BLISS LUQUIENO

AS Mr. Shipley says himself, his task was twofold: to select and to recreate. There is no fault to be found with his selection. His explanatory notes, moreover, are excellent. Taken all together, they form a delightful essay on the modern French poets. But he has seldom accomplished successful recreation. He could not, given his method. "Some of the present renderings," he says, "contain words that may seem affected or inept, inversions and other forms that may seem awkward; before condemning the English, the reader should reflect that facility is perhaps easier than faithfulness, and that the purpose of this volume is not to demonstrate the technical skill of the translator, but to convey the spirit of the original."

But the spirit of most of the poetry in question consists in large part of just what Mr. Shipley does not, by his own confession, try to reflect. Its spirit is *music*. The motto of the Symbolists and their followers was "De la musique avant toute chose."

So the translator who is willing, even for the sake of faithfulness, to use such unmusical rhymes as *twilight—high light—very light*, and *horizon—flies on*, and *stilly—lily*, all in the same short poem, cannot hope to recreate the spirit of an original that does nothing of the kind. Moreover, the lack of music in Mr. Shipley's translations is not only the result of poorly chosen words. It is often due to the substitution of unmeasured for measured lines. The translation of Verlaine's "Chanson d'Automne," for example, is much less rhythmic than the original, each verse of which is carefully measured:

The heavy thrall	Les sanglots longs
Of the sobbing fall	Des violons
Of the fall	De l'automne
Weights, nor de-	Blessant mon cœur
parts,	
Like my heart's	D'une langueur
Pall.	Monotone.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Shipley did not give more heed to "facility," and did not, besides, keep more faithfully the promise, made in his Introduction, of retaining "the line-length, and freedom or strictness of foot," of his originals. An unmusical Verlaine, or a Verlaine that is only relatively rhythmic, is not Verlaine at all.

## Three Anthologies

THE OXFORD BOOK OF PORTUGUESE VERSE. Chosen by AUBREY F. G. BELL. Oxford University Press. 1926. \$3.75.

SONNETS AND POEMS OF ANTHERO DE QUENTAL. Translated by S. GRISWOLD MORLEY. University of California Press. 1926.

SONNETS WITH FOLK SONGS FROM THE SPANISH. By HAVELOCK ELLIS. Houghton Mifflin. 1926. \$3.

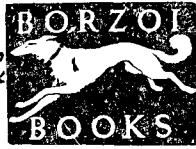
Reviewed by RUDOLPH SCHEVILL

THE Portuguese may claim the rare distinction of having composed some of the choicest of the world's lyric poetry, and this anthology has been prepared by Mr. Bell with admirable taste. It contains an unusual number of songs remarkable for their charm and perfect craftsmanship. Possibly no greater meed of praise can be given to the little collection than to say that it is not only a fitting companion volume for the "Oxford Book of Spanish Verse," but that for sheer lyricism together with beauty and depth of thought it very frequently surpasses it. The history of Portuguese verse shows three epochs noteworthy for their extensive productivity: the mediæval, which runs well into the fourteenth century, the great flowering period of the sixteenth century, at the forefront of which stand such unique poets as Gil Vicente, Camoens, and Bernardim Ribeiro, and the last hundred years in which are prominent such names as Almeida Garrett, Herculano, Antero de Quental, and Castilho; writers like Guerra Junqueiro and Teixeira represent the national lyric genius well into our own days. The introduction gives an appreciative account of Portuguese lyric art.

Since the general reader does not as a rule become acquainted with this verse in the original, such a volume as Professor Morley's translations of Antero de Quental's sonnets and poems cannot be too highly recommended. He has caught to a remarkable extent the poignant beauty, the depth and the technical excellence of Quental's verse, notably in the case of the sonnets. Others have ventured to make translations of Quental, but none can so frequently claim to have worthily rendered a most difficult original.

Mr. Havelock Ellis's volume containing original verse mingled with translations from the Spanish, is of inferior worth, and the name of the distinguished author alone lends an interest to its pages. The sonnets, all written between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five show, on the whole, a genuine sincerity and much of the warmth and color inherent in youthful productions; but they also betray a stiffness and lack of inspiration. The little stanzas of four verses, by which Mr. Ellis renders the Spanish *coplas* are amusing, and now and then catch a successful note; but the monotony of their English form gives no adequate garb to these infinitely varied popular songs. This the author admits when he says that his translations are faithful verbally, but that they avoid "most variations of effect" and present "a certain loose uniformity." Possibly a volume of translations would do better without the interspersed sonnets.





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