

James S Holmes

Translating Martial and Vergil Jacob Lowland among the Classics

(Extracts from a talk to the University of Iowa Translation Workshop,
January 1984)

James Stratton Holmes (1924-1986) was dichter en vertaler, geboren in de VS en in 1950 voor zijn grote liefde Hans van Marle voorgoed naar Nederland verhuisd. Hij publiceerde als James S Holmes en ook onder de pseudoniemen Jim Holmes en Jacob Lowland. Hij was aanvankelijk docent aan het Instituut voor Algemene Literatuurwetenschap van de Universiteit van Amsterdam en later aan de afdeling theoretische vertaalwetenschap. Hij was opsteller van leerprogramma's voor het Instituut voor de Opleiding tot Vertaler en Tolk, later als Instituut voor Vertaalkunde en nog weer later als Instituut voor Vertaalwetenschap geïntegreerd in de Universiteit van Amsterdam. Mede door zijn toedoen werd de vertaalwetenschap een volwaardige afstudeerrichting. Zijn gezaghebbende artikelen over de theorie van het vertalen verwierven internationale bekendheid en zijn nog altijd te vinden in bronvermeldingen van buitenlandse studies op dit terrein. Samen met Hans van Marle was hij poëziedirecteur van het legendarische Engelstalige tijdschrift Delta, geheel gewijd aan Nederlandse en Vlaamse cultuur, waarin hij met grote regelmaat moderne Nederlandse poëzie vertaalde, met name van de 'Vijftigers' en de 'na-Vijftigers'. Een van zijn grote wapenfeiten was zijn vertaling van Nijhoffs lange gedicht Awater, die ook in het buitenland indruk maakte. Volgens T.S. Eliot zou Nijhoff wereldberoemd zijn geweest als hij niet in het Nederlands maar in het Engels had geschreven en Joseph Brodsky roemde Awater als een van de beste gedichten die hij ooit had gelezen. In 1984 werd Holmes, net als bij de Nijhoffprijs, als eerste buitenlander bekroond met de Vertaalprijs van de Vlaamse Gemeenschap. Zijn onschatbare verdienste als bezorger van Nederlandse poëzie in het Engelse taalgebied werd treffend bekroond toen het Translation Center van Columbia University zijn naam verbond aan een nieuwe prijs voor vertalingen uit het Nederlands: de James S Holmes Award. Holmes

was zo goed in Nederland ingeburgerd – ondanks zijn Amerikaanse accent en de zonden die hij tot het einde toe bleef begaan tegen het correcte gebruik van de Nederlandse lidwoorden – dat hij probleemloos zitting nam in allerlei besturen en commissies, zelfs toetrad tot de redactie van het Nederlands-Vlaamse jongerentijdschrift Gard Sivik en meewerkte aan literaire tijdschriften als Litterair Paspoort, De Gids, De Nieuwe Stem, Maatstaf en De Revisor. Vermaard is de ‘workshop poëzievertalen’ die hij jarenlang gaf bij hem thuis aan de Amsterdamse Weteringschans en waarmee hij velen stimuleerde om te gaan vertalen. Ook was hij actief lid van de Nederlandse en Internationale PEN, de Vereniging van Letterkundigen, de Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde en de Nationale Unesco Commissie, en daarnaast bestuurslid van de Stichting ter Bevordering van de Vertaling van Nederlands Letterkundig Werk in het Buitenland, het Nederlands Genootschap van Vertalers en de organisatie Schrijvers, School, Samenleving, en erelid van de Vereniging van Vlaamse Letterkundigen. Holmes behoorde tot de vroege aidsdoden in Nederland. ‘Translating Martial and Vergil’ werd opgetekend door Daniel Weissbort en verscheen oorspronkelijk in Translating Poetry – The Double Labyrinth. VertaalVerhaal dankt Suzanne Glémot (University of Iowa Press), Sara Martínez García (SpringerNature) en Liz Dennis (Johnson & Alcock Ltd) voor hun hulp, en Peter van Haasen voor de toestemming de voordracht hier te mogen publiceren. Hierbij zij aangetekend dat VertaalVerhaal in principe alleen Nederlandstalige teksten publiceert, maar in dit geval graag eenzelfde uitzondering maakt als destijds bij de publicatie van Holmes’ dankwoord bij de aanvaarding van de Martinus Nijhoffprijs in 1956.

Translating Martial and Vergil Jacob Lowland among the Classics

I began life as an Iowa farm boy and went to high school – the high school no longer exists, near Clemons, north of State Center – where it was quite unheard of anyone wanting to learn a foreign language. And I remember a group of us tried to pressure the school into giving us a course in, of all things, Latin, and there just wasn't the possibility, because there simply wasn't a teacher to teach Latin. Nor was there anyone to teach another foreign language either. When I went to college – I got a BA, along the road, in Oskaloosa, from William Penn – I had the good fortune of having a brilliant Central European refugee as a teacher of German, who was really wasted on us. There he was, one of the world's authorities on Dante, teaching first- and second-year German. And we were all – practically all of us – Iowa farm kids. And for some reason or other, from the very beginning, learning another language – I was, of course, terribly hooked on poetry – I got all tied up with immediately trying to translate poems from that other language into English. Of course my first attempts were miserable, but he encouraged me greatly. And then, when I went on to graduate school and suddenly to my own surprise got interested in Old English, not just as a linguistic exercise, but as a body of poetry that is very remote and still one of our roots, I started translating some of the shorter Old English poems, carefully avoiding Pound at the same time. So, it was natural that when, by a fluke, I ended up as a Fulbright teacher in Holland, one of the first things I did was to start asking around who the leading poets were, whom I should be reading, and actually, within a year, publishing my first two translations of poetry from the Dutch – in *Poetry Quarterly*, out of London. [...]

I've always had the problem, translating from the Dutch, that you feel – even though I don't believe in such things as definitive translation – *this* translation will probably be the only one ever made of this poem in the near future. So you have an important responsibility to the poet, to the text. [...] It was a very liberating thing for me, therefore, when I was here in Iowa City in '75, as a member of the International Writing Program, and working a lot with the Translation Workshop, that I could make all sorts of crazy experiments, because what I was producing was just part of the workshop and not something for publication, nor with that feeling of responsibility to the poet, that this is probably going to be the only translation of the poem he'll ever see. [...] And actually, since that time, I've been more experimental. In fact, for quite a different reason, I've developed an alter ego who also writes poetry, Jacob Lowland, and Jacob Lowland is a much less moral person than Jim Holmes, or James Holmes. He believes in doing all sorts of crazy things [...] But I want to emphasize that you have to know what is there, in the first place, before you embark on these kinds of experiments. And never just rely on your dictionaries; research is essential. I've been living with a Dutch guy for thirty years, so I have my resource person at hand, and his English is very good and my Dutch is pretty good, but still, after thirty, thirty-five years, I often have to ask him the meaning of things, I

still get caught out. [...]

Some of you may have seen the *Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse* that came out last year. It's not a very good anthology. It has a lot of very perverse – if I may use the word in this context – translations in it. But it's the first anthology that has ever been issued which gives an overview of poetry about erotic relationships between men and men, or men and boys, since the Greek Anthology, many ages ago. And one of the things that I've been concerned with is showing again today that there is a tradition which runs counter to the tradition we're all presented with in our literature courses, simply because our literature courses, certainly since the Renaissance, have been dominated by male, straight versions of what literature is, very Christian in background, and very moral behind the aesthetic. A few years ago I decided that I wanted to teach a seminar which combined gay concerns with translation... and what I did was to choose some of Catullus' poems. Catullus is known to most of you, if you know him at all, as one of the great love poets of all times, for his quite anguished, tortured poems to and about Lesbia. But perhaps before, perhaps after, but possibly at the same time as he was having an affair with Lesbia, he was also having one with a boy named Juventius. So I thought it would be an interesting study to see what translators in English, from the Renaissance on, have done with those poems of his to this boy. It turned out that there have been ups and downs, that there are periods when it's quite easy to translate classics which refer to man-boy relationships, as long as they are classical and not contemporary. And actually one of the major problems of translating Catullus through the ages has been not his homosexual feelings, but his obscenity, the street language. Only since about 1965 has it been possible for people to use such language in poetry and get it published. It's not a question of what poets dare to do, often, but of what publishers dare to publish, because of the censorship laws. [...]

Well, one of the results of that project was that, while I was looking around for translations everywhere, I found myself at a certain point trying to work out a way of dealing with the Latin line when translating it into English. In most of the traditional English renderings of Latin and Greek texts you either get terribly long lines that just seem to break down in the middle, or else things get left out, or else there are half as many lines again as in the original. My solution for Catullus was to make every line in the Latin two lines in the English. So you get a sort of loose trimeter pattern in English; two trimeter lines would correspond to one line in the Catullus. And the discipline of working line for line, in this way, seemed to be very fruitful, for me at any rate, in getting some kind of form and concision into the translation. So I now have a sheaf of about twelve poems of Catullus, and hope one day to write an article about translating these poems, one in particular...

I hadn't done anything more with Latin until this past summer. I picked up a book called *From Daphne to Laurel*, which is a very interesting anthology of how English-language translators – English means British; the Americans were quite neglected! – how British translators have dealt with the classics, from the Middle Ages up to today. It's arranged not by poets but by translators, chronologically, and a number of the poems are actually translated several times in the course of this

anthology. A fascinating book... Well, I came across a poem that I didn't know, in an anonymous late seventeenth-century version, by someone who brought out a book of Martial translations. I'm fascinated by this poem. It was August. I was having office hours. Office hours in August, in Europe, where we don't have summer school, is a time when you do things for yourself. It's warm – not hot like here – but warm enough to have you not do things you ought to be doing. So I sat down and started to make a translation, a new rendering – from the English, the seventeenth-century English – and I took it home with me, and I thought on my way home, well, I'd better get out my Martial and check what he really said, instead of what so-and-so says. And that's the next stage. But – and I'm sorry I don't have that seventeenth-century English version with me – let me just read the literal English translation that you have of number 69. I should also warn you that the edition I have of Martial, though it's also Loeb Classical Library, is a recent reprint, and the only edition that we found here is the earlier, twenties one. Also, you may not know very much about Martial. Martial was a first-century Silver Age poet, who was not the most obscene of all the Latin poets but falls into that category. My edition is quite a good contemporary one. It uses... well, it doesn't use quite the four-letter words that we might, but it's fairly explicit, though it still employs somewhat archaic words. The version you have, we found when we checked it out, whenever things get a bit too rough, shifts to Italian! In fact one of the poems that I translated at that time, the whole poem, exists only in Italian here. Anyway, the translation of the particular poem I'm going to read is pretty much the same in both editions. [...] The poem's about a certain Mamurra. All these epigrams refer to someone by name. That's one of the rules of the classical epigram. Either it's the name of a person being spoken about, or the name of a person being addressed. Most of the time it's the person being addressed. But this one is simply about Mamurra.

MARTIAL, BOOK IXL, IX

Mamurra, long and often wandering in the Saepta, here where Golden Rome flings about her wealth, inspected and devoured with his eyes dainty boys, not those the outer stalls made public, but those who are guarded by the platform of a secret stand, and whom the people do not see, nor the crowd of such as I. Then, sated with the view, he had tables and round covered table-tops laid bare, and must needs have their high-hung glistening ivory supports brought down; and after four measurements of a tortoise-shell couch for six, he said with a sigh that it was too small for his citrus-wood table. He took counsel of his nose whether the bronzes smelt of Corinth, and condemned even your statuary, Polyclitus; and, complaining that the crystal vases were disfigured by a small piece of glass, he put his seal on ten murrine articles, and set them aside. He weighed antique tankards, and any cups made precious by Mentor's handiwork, and counted the emeralds set in chased gold, and every larger pearl that tinkles from a snow-white ear. Genuine sardonyxes he looked for on every table, and offered a price for some big jaspers. When at the eleventh hour, fagged out, he was at last departing, for a penny he bought two cups – and bore them off himself.

Now there are some things I should tell you about this fairly good English text, although the more recent version is somewhat less high-flown, a little bit more straightforward. This is about a man, Mamurra, who is wandering around window-shopping (that's actually the title of the seventeenth-century poem: 'Window-shopping', so the concept existed even then). Mamurra is a name that goes back to the time of Catullus, and I suspect that Martial knew that. Julius Caesar's friend, his lover until he died, was named Mamurra, and Catullus absolutely hated him. Apparently Catullus' father was a friend of Caesar's, and Caesar, though a dictator, was not quite like modern dictators and could take quite a bit of criticism. Catullus' satyric poems against Caesar are really vitriolic, and even more so about his friend. [...] Peter Wigham, in the Penguin translation of Catullus, translated Mamurra with a pun, as O'Toole. Anyway, Mamurra is wandering around Rome, in the district where the most expensive shops are, and he's window-shopping, as we say. [...] In the late seventeenth-century English version he is in the wealthier section of London, shopping but not buying anything, just looking around. When I started I decided that I wanted to translate this so that it communicated in the present day, to gay people in the present day; that was the first decision I made. This meant I was going to make a lot of changes in what were traditionally called in literary studies (though not any longer) 'realia', concrete cultural items, that functioned then and no longer function today. It's a very risky business, of course, and many people would say that's not translation anymore. I suddenly thought of the fact that there used to be a place in San Francisco which was called The World's Largest Gay Department Store. And I was reminded too of the fact that it had one department, not of used furniture, but of *abused* furniture. Stocks, cages for slaves, and so on. And that set me off. Instead of letting him go to various shops, I'll situate him just in the gay department store, I thought. There was also an area in the store where you could cruise other guys, but I turned that into a place where you could buy slaves – slave isn't understood in quite the same way that it was in Rome, but you can play with that sort of thing. So one idea led to another and I ended up imagining what sort of a person this might be. He wanders around a gay department store, looking at all these things and commenting on them. He's the aesthetic queen type, with a special way of talking. And this led to the translation which you have in front of you, called 'Window Shopping'.

When I started translating, or adapting, I stayed in the same iambic pentameter form that the anonymous translator in the late seventeenth-century had used. My first versions were all in rhymed couplets, iambic pentameter. Later I decided that it would be more effective to break up the pentameter line. Sometimes it breaks in the third foot and sometimes somewhere in the middle, where it seems to work most effectively. So these are in fact iambic pentameter couplets, broken into four-line stanzas instead of two-line couplets.

WINDOW SHOPPING

O'Toole in *ennui*

(life is *such* a bore)
goes shopping
in the Gay Department Store.

First to the Slave Department.
With his eyes
he eats 'em up:
not those on show for guys

like you & me,
but prime-time types locked tight
in special rooms
tucked out of common sight.

None's *hot* enough.
Now Stocks & Pillories.
He checks out this one, that.
None of them *please*.

He measures all the slings,
twice, three times, four.
None of them *fit*.
When *will* you have some *more*?

Now on to Art.
There's this new set of draw-
ings just in from Finland.
Look! A flaw.

O *Tom*, how *could* you!
Time to contemplate
the silver cockrings.
Silver! Silver plate!

He *loves* the harnesses,
has three of them
laid by, *adores* a belt
(each studded gem

selected & set in
by Rob Himself),
counts every stone,
then moves on to the shelf

with rings & earrings.
 Oooh, the *diamond's* nice.
The *big* one.
 Oh? *That* much? At *half* the price...

Exhausted after four hours' stay,
 he'll buy
two jars of Lube &
 really have to fly.

Now obviously everything's new here, everything's different. I should say something first about a few of the references, because though they'd be known in the gay world, they'll not necessarily be known to you! 'Tom of Finland' – that's not his true name, which is an unpronounceable Finnish one; he's never worked under his own name because Finnish laws on homosexuality were, until a few years ago, very strict – is an artist known throughout the gay world, but completely unknown outside of it. 'Rob Himself', Rob of Amsterdam, runs an art gallery in Amsterdam and is Europe's best-known leather and accessory maker for gays in the leather scene. 'Lube' is a lubricant, which has largely replaced Crisco. It's the sort of thing that you would buy the way you pick up some small item after you've been shopping around for hours. [...] The surprising thing now is that, with all the liberties I've taken, I've at the same time given you a line-for-line version – that is, two lines for one, though of course there's some running over, and you have to tuck things into one line because English syntax doesn't correspond with Latin. And whenever something has been substituted, it's always something that has a relation to the original, a translation of a cultural item which functioned in the Roman world into a cultural item akin to it which functions in the contemporary gay world.

Now when I translated, when *Jim Holmes* translated, Catullus, he felt that using rhyme for Latin poetry, for classical poetry in general, was barbaric. Well, it is! Rhyme came into European poetry in the early Middle Ages, from India by way of Persian and Islamic poetry. And I've always felt that we really shouldn't use it when translating classical poetry. However, I was led – not I, in this case, because these poems were translated by Jacob Lowland! – Jacob Lowland was misled, perhaps, in the first place, by this beautiful seventeenth-century neo-classical couplet pattern. Now Jacob Lowland, unlike Jim Holmes, loves to rhyme, and so he had a lot of fun doing this. And at a certain point I became convinced that probably rhyme is the right vehicle for dealing with these very taut, witty epigrams of Martial, quite different from the poetry of Catullus. So that perhaps what we need to do, when choosing forms for translating classical poetry, is to approach each poet differently. You can't reproduce Latin verse forms. We tried it in the sixteenth century, in English, and it just doesn't work. I don't think that the many translations of the Iliad and the Odyssey, for instance, into hexameters work. The hexameters get in the way – for me, at any rate. Many have chosen simply to use free verse, but free verse lacks the discipline, it seems to me, that these poets were imposing on themselves. And it

is important to suggest that there is such a discipline. For each poet I try to see if I can find a formal principle which will reflect that poet's style, and I think that I, or Jacob Lowland, was right to decide that Martial needs rhyme.

Well, it was primarily this poem that I wanted to deal with, but since in the photocopying it also worked out that we copied both the Latin and the literal in English and Jacob Lowland's translations of Number 57 too, we might as well just look at that for a moment. In this case we have a line-for-line correspondence. It's a shorter verse that Martial is using here, so I, or Jacob, put that into a sort of four-beat, four-accent line, with rhyme – somewhat complicated rhyme. Here is the literal.

MARTIAL, BOOK IX, LVII

Nothing is worn smoother than Hedylus' mantles: not the handles of antique Corinthian vases, nor a shank polished by a ten-years-worn fetter, nor the scarred neck of a broken-winded mule, nor the ruts that intersect the Flaminian Way, nor the pebbles that shine on the sea beach, nor a hoe polished by a Tuscan vineyard, nor the shiny toga of a defunct pauper, nor the ramshackle wheel of a lazy carrier, nor a bison's flank scraped by its cage, nor the tusk, now aged, of a fierce boar. Yet there is one thing – he himself will not deny it: Hedylus' rump is worn smoother than his mantle.

This is a traditional form in the epigram – Martial does it a number of times – listing all these things that it is not, and then saying what it is; not something we do in poetry today. The items he lists would be known to any Roman, so I've tried to replace them with things which would have some association for us today. The roads that intersect the Flaminian Way, for instance... They didn't have paved streets, and at the intersections it got pretty bumpy. Now that doesn't happen to us in our cities, except in New York City, because the streets are not repaired there... Actually I didn't really think of that at the time, but you could have done something with the New York City potholes. Anyway, I simply moved it out into the country. It's an image which probably doesn't even work for young people today, out in the country, because even the country roads are better now, but I have terrible memories of deep ruts in spring, riding those country roads. It's the same with 'the bison's flank scraped by its cage'. I don't think that the idea or sight of bisons in a cage would signify much to us. That's why I changed the bison to a lion. Or the 'tusk of a fierce boar'. Now I don't suppose any of us ever even saw a wild boar. So I introduced a billy-goat instead. And that got me into another difficulty: butt-prone billy-goats. This meant I couldn't talk, at the end, about Harry's butt being worn, and so, as I had to have a single-syllable word, I resorted to the briticism 'bum'... though I could have said 'can', I suppose. Likewise with 'the handles of antique Corinthian vases', trying to think in terms of an image people could associate with, I ended up with the 'stein', which is not quite on the same aesthetic level as a Corinthian vase. So there are a lot of risks taken here. [...]

You certainly wouldn't treat the next poet we're going to be talking about, Vergil,

in this way. It depends on an understanding of Martial and what he's trying to do. And he's usually pretty straightforward and down-to-earth. There are a few poems when he ascends to other poetic heights, and there you wouldn't go in for this sort of thing. Let me read you my version now. Obviously I've changed Hedylus' name to Harry, and the only basis I have for that is they both begin with an 'h'. I mean they bear no other relation to each other. But what do you do with Latin names that have no resonance at all, when you're working in this kind of a modernization? [...] By the way, I generally consult a friend who is at this moment working on his dissertation on Martial. So I think he picked up most of the errors I made. We talked about these names and he wasn't familiar with them; he said they were just names, very often of friends or enemies and so forth, and they had no special symbolic or other significance.

HARRY'S COAT

Nothing's worn smoother than Harry's coat:
not the handle on a long-used stein,
a slave's wrist polished by years of rope,
a city dog's neck, rubbed by the line,
the ruts that cut country roads in spring,
the gleaming pebbles on ocean beaches,
a hoe for suburban gardening,
the shiny seat of a beggar's britches,

rickety wheels on a market cart,
the bare-scraped flanks of a zoo-caged lion,
the horns on a butt-prone billy goat.
Wait! There's one thing I wouldn't deny him:
his bum's worn smoother than Harry's coat.

I might mention a couple of things: the whole succession of 'Nil, non, nec, nec, nec' and so forth, that I wasn't able to retain; and one last-minute change that I made. I had: 'Wait! There's one thing, he wouldn't deny it: / his bum's worn smoother than Harry's coat.' This is closer to the Latin, but I finally changed it to 'I wouldn't deny him', because it's a better rhyme with 'lion'. I suspect I may, in a later edition, change it back to 'deny it'. [There is some discussion about the danger of built-in obsolescence in this kind of translation. In particular, the 'hoe for suburban gardening' is mentioned. Holmes continues ...] Of course, if this is supposed to be America today, this no longer works. That's the sort of bind you get into when you do cultural translations. But I still liked it. That is, it expresses my *dislike* for suburban life. [...]

Anyway, as I was saying, these are all experiments. After I'd been working on Martial for a while they came out in a small special publication, for a conference, a colloquium that I was organizing last November. About eight of these poems are in it. I'd also been interested, for some time, in the Second Eclogue of Vergil, which plays

an important, I'd almost say central, role in western European poetry. Vergil began as a young poet, by writing a series of Eclogues, and most people think that this one is probably his first, although it's number two in the series. It's probably the first poem he ever decided was good enough to publish, and it has a personal tone that his later writing doesn't have. In the Aeneid he becomes, as it were, the poet of the Roman state, something like Robert Frost in his later years – the official poet of these United States. Well, that's the role that Vergil came to play and his later poetry is extremely impressive, but here a clear personal note is sounded. You will notice, as we read through it, echoes that you may think I introduced from the English tradition, but actually they're echoes within that tradition from this poem, especially in the eighteenth century, Gray's *Elegy*, for instance. The poem itself also echoes the Alexandrian poets, especially Theocritus. It's about a shepherd who is in love with a boy named Alexis, but Alexis doesn't pay him any attention. Probably this is also a personal theme. The legend, the myth, is that Vergil was in love with a slave boy named Alexis and that Mycaenas, his patron, gave him this boy as a slave, and that they stayed together for the rest of their lives. It's not certain this is true, but it appears pretty early on in the literature, and most of the classical critics and writers think that, in fact, it is true. We'll take a look at the literal version you have. [...] Now Vergil, even in these Eclogues, writes in a high style, as opposed to a low style. These terms are too much bandied about in western literary history, but you have at least three styles: the high style, the middle style and the low style. Satyric epigrams you wrote in the low style, and epic you of course wrote in the high style. Vergil's poetry, on the whole, is written in the high style. He would never have thought of using some of the words that Martial or Catullus use. In fact Vergil, Catullus and Cicero were more or less contemporaries, and you almost get the feeling that Catullus was deliberately using words that were not supposed to be used in poetry and in literary Latin. Cicero, at almost the same time as Catullus was writing poems using street language, gave a list, in one of his books, of words that should never be used in proper writing, and Catullus uses all of them. Martial does too. Vergil would never have done this. His poem about his love for Alexis is quite unerotic, in the sense that it doesn't get down to the physical details at all. And he writes it in the classical verse form, the high style, in hexameters. It seemed to me that to reflect this traditionalism of Vergil, the high style, and the sense of extending a tradition, not only a Latin tradition but also a Greek one, required something like blank verse in English.

As I've said, one of the problems with most of the traditional English translations is that for every four lines of Latin you have to have about six lines of English, if you're going to put it in the iambic pentameter. And on the other hand there is a problem with the high style in Latin, that it's chock full of information, and if you translate all this information, things move very slowly indeed. So I wondered whether I couldn't force myself to be concise and sprightly and moving along, if I tried to translate line for line. And that's what I did here. For every line in the Latin there is a line in the English, which means that in many cases I've simply left things out; but it also means that I was obliged to look for the most compact way of saying things, and that often I was able to use one or two words where most of the

translators up to now have used half a line. Let me just read it to you in English. This is pretty traditional verse that I hope is twentieth-century verse as well.

VERGIL, ECLOGUE TWO

The shepherd Corydon's aflame for Alex,
his lord's delight. No hope for Corydon.
All he can do is haunt the spots where beeches
spread their high shade, and sing, caught in love's ardor
these artless shreds of song to woods and hills.
Cruel Alex, don't you like my songs at all?
Have you no pity? You will be my death.

Now is the hour when cattle seek the shade,
when even lizards creep beneath the brushwood,
and Thestyl brews a thyme-and-garlic drink
for farmhands fazed by the searing heat.
Yet while the orchards echo the cicada
I trace the paths you've walked, in blazing sun.

Would it have not been better to put up with
Amaryl's sulks and airs? Or with Menalcas,
swarthy though he may be – and you so fair?
O pretty boy, don't count too much on color!
the privet's white flowers fall, dark hyacinths stand.

You scorn me, Alex. You don't even ask
what kind of man I am, what flocks I have.
A thousand lambs of mine range Sicily's hills;
summer, winter, I never lack fresh milk.

And I can sing, as once Amphion sang
railing the cows home from the Theban hills.

Nor can you claim I'm ugly. At the sea
the other day I saw my own reflection.
I can match Daphnis - unless mirrors lie

If only you would come and live with me
under a simple roof, here in the country,
to hunt the deer, to herd the goats with switches.

With me to teach, you'll learn to play like Pan
(Pan who taught how to wax-seal reeds together,
Pan who looks after sheep and after shepherds),
and not be vexed, if a reed chafes your lip:

Amyntas was so keen he shrank from nothing.

I have a pipe with seven graded stalks:

Dametis gave me it as he lay dying.

He said to me: You are its second slave.

Those were his words. Amyntas was quite jealous.

Then this: I found two baby chamois, trapped
in a wild dale. They've white spots on their coats.
They suck the ewe twice daily. They're for you,
though Thestyl nags at me to let her have them.
And so I will, since you snub all my gifts.

O pretty boy, come. Can't you see the nymphs
laden with lilies for you, see the naiads
picking you poppies and pale irises,
tying narcissi fast to pimpernels,
with cinnamon and other herbs twined in,
and marigolds to mark the hyacinths.
And I'll pick quinces, with their white, frail blossoms,
the chestnuts Amaryl loved when she was mine,
and waxy plums (yes, let plums too be honored).
Then you, you laurels, and your friends the myrtles:
set side by side, you sweetly blend your scents.

Corydon, you're a yokel. Alex doesn't
want gifts from you: Iollas can give better.
O, O! What have I done? I've let the south wind
ruin my flowers, wild boars muddy my springs.

Alex, why run from me? there have been gods
who've made the woods their home. And Paris. Let
Athena live in town, for me the forests.

The lion chases the wolf, the wolf the kid;
the kid frisks off in search of clover blossoms.
And I chase you. Each drawn by his own dream.

The oxen pull the plow home, blade hung high;
the westering sun casts shadows double-long.
Yet love still burns me up - and what can stop it?

O Corydon, Corydon, what's this madness?
You've left the vines half-pruned, their elms untrimmed.
Instead of this, why not do something useful?
Go weave a basket out of twigs or reeds.
If Alex scorns you, there are other boys.

[...] One of my problems in translating this was that it has been such an important poem historically, and that you do have to preserve some of the echoes that we all know from English literature. I should say a bit more about the importance, in western literature, of the Eclogues in general. They became a norm for aspiring young poets in the Renaissance, if not in classical times. The way to begin as a poet was to write pastorals, eclogues, and the Neo-Latin poets of the Renaissance all did that. Also, at least one of those pastorals had to be about a shepherd's love for a boy rather than for a woman. It's very interesting how this became a part of the western European tradition. The classical tradition of boy-love and Christianity, with its

prohibition of sexuality, run parallel to each other all through the Renaissance. For instance, Spenser's first book, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, is a series of twelve pastorals, one for each month. [...] Spenser had a passionate friendship with Gabriel Harvey, his mentor. And Harvey was quite jealous of Spenser's heterosexual interests. They shared a room at Oxford, in the long university tradition of having 'unlawful loves'. Even Pope began in this way with his first publication. It was a series of eclogues or pastorals, and one of the eclogues is about his relationship with an older poet, his mentor.

But aside from this tradition you get the other one, which goes all the way through English poetry. And that does leave the translator with a certain responsibility. You really need to get that echo in there, I think. So at various places, especially towards the end, I try to reflect this tradition. But take also the passage that begins at line 8: 'Now is the hour when cattle seek the shade...' You can find that sort of thing in various pastoral poems, as well as the description of the noonday heat and then, at the end, the sunset: 'The oxen pull the plow home, blade hung high' – which is not literally out of Gray, yet the resemblance is there. And the 'O Corydon, Corydon' also became a standard quotation and is parodied and copied all through later Latin poetry; you even find it, now and then, in the vernaculars. So that sort of thing *needs* to be reflected, I think, to show that the poem has a long tradition behind it in our language, and in western literature as a whole. But somehow it has also to be language that people can respond to today. The translator is torn between these two requirements. I've tried to achieve a balance. I didn't feel, in this poem, that I could change names and realia in the way that I did with Martial. I should add, as a postscript, that this version has not yet been checked by my classicist friend, so it is not final, just a version at a certain stage. [...]

[Further discussion follows about making a text modern, the danger of 'premature ageing' if there are too many contemporary references. The 'Window Shopping' poem is mentioned in this connection. Holmes comments ...] That doesn't worry me at all. I'm quite willing for translations to age very fast. In fact, I'm quite willing for my own poetry to age very fast. I'm very much concerned with communication *now*. [...] Urban poetry, with this sort of reference to a concrete time and place, ages very fast. But we make the effort to read eighteenth-century poetry about London, and figure out the details... Actually, for original poetry, I don't think it's such a problem. I think that people who are really interested in poetry, and who have an historic sense, will do that work... I believe firmly in new translations for every generation... It's a somewhat different situation with a translation now of a poet now. The translation *can* age in the same way as the poem. But with the translation now of an older text, the translation will date, while the text will remain. Look at the history of the translation of the classics. I think you'll agree that the translations before Pound can only be read historically now; we can't read them as living poems any more. And I think that's something that as translators we simply have to accept. [...]