



FILOZOFICKÁ FAKULTA
UNIVERZITY KARLOVY
V PRAZE



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

Supervisor's Report on

ELIZABETH BISHOP: TRANSLATION AS POETICS
by Mariana Machová

Doctoral Thesis
Submitted March 2011

There is very little of worth that can be said by a supervisor in a report of this kind. If the supervisor has done his work properly, then the thesis itself should face the judgement of external assessors without any support or further recommendations. A doctoral thesis is many things, but primarily it is proof that the candidate is the peer of her reviewers from what is referred to in Czech as the *akademická obec*. It is proof that the candidate can become a member of this academic community, possessing the critical skills, knowledge and judiciousness, to assess in turn other members as well as future candidates who wish to join this community. It is proof that the candidate will use her independent opinion to assess the work of others, regardless of their titles, positions and powers. It is proof that she will not defer to authority in questions of her area, because she herself is now an authority. And finally, it is proof that the candidate not only has the potential to advance and transform a particular area of study, but has in fact done this in the submitted text. In my opinion, Mariana Machová's thesis, 'Elizabeth Bishop: Translation as Poetics', is proof on all the accounts above.

There are thus only two things I wish to state here. The first, according to the Dean's Decree 20/2010/9, is a general evaluation of the candidate's study and the dissertation. The latter I have provided in the first paragraph. With regard the former I wish to say that during the time Ms Machová was working on the thesis she became a full-time lecturer in literature at the Josef Škvorecký Literary Academy; she also taught a Masters course at our Department which related to the subject of her thesis. I view this teaching as a central part of her doctoral studies as it allowed her to gain a deeper perspective on the context and significance of her research. She also pursued that research on two occasions in the United States, once as a Fulbright Scholar at Boston University for a year, and later on a stipend from our own Faculty. While in the US she made contact and conferred with experts in the field of twentieth-century American poetry as well as translation studies; she also used these opportunities to carry out archival research especially in Vassar College and Harvard University, where the majority of Bishop's papers are stored. A further component of her study was her translation of selections of Elizabeth Bishop's prose and poetry, in two volumes, published by Opus and Fra respectively. All this displays an exceptional professionalism and dedication to her chosen subject.

The second matter I wish to raise relates to my own involvement in her research. Ms Machová is my first doctoral student to complete her thesis and our work together on her thesis has lasted for just under a decade. As the precise form of her findings began to emerge



Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur

about four years ago, it became clear to me that this was an exceptionally rich way of looking at poetry and literature in general. As she writes in her thesis, translation as a phenomenon has been sidelined for most of the twentieth century in Anglophone literary studies (only in the first decade of the new century has there been a significant rise in translation studies); what she brilliantly demonstrates, however, is that translation can become a theme in poetry, and more importantly a mode of the poetic imagination. Thus, as she again states in her work, she adduces Bishop's translation work not to document an insignificant activity on a par with an inventory of the poet's shopping lists, but to show how integral the translator's manoeuvres are to her manoeuvres as a poet. Bishop's engagement with a culture and language different from her own resulted in several translations from Portuguese, but more profoundly affected and transformed her poetry. As Ms Machová shows, in her extended reading of Bishop's early poem 'The Map', the poet was obviously well disposed to this way of thinking even before she arrived in Brazil. Perhaps this is the reason why she felt at home to such a degree there.

I began to realise the multiple possibilities for reading the work of other poets in precisely such a way--W. H. Auden and German, Seamus Heaney and Latin, James Merrill and Greek, Paul Muldoon and Irish, and with French the poets Ciaran Carson, Marilyn Hacker and John Ashbery. These are not merely poets who have translated the few odd texts from these languages, but poets whose deepest imaginative forces have been shaped by engagement with another language and culture. In historical terms, Anglophone literary studies has tended to be intensely uninterested in contexts that lie beyond the bourne of its own language, even while the poets themselves have been more curious--from Wyatt, Sidney, Milton, Dryden, Coleridge, Byron, Eliot, Stevens, Pound, to name but a few. However, with the publication of books such as Wai Chee Dimock's *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (2006), Jahan Ramazani's *A Transnational Poetics* (2009) and Peter Robinson's *Poetry and Translation: The Art of the Impossible* (2010), this idea is drawing more attention. On the foot of these impulses I embarked on my own research, primarily concerned with the poets enumerated in the first sentence of this paragraph. It is more usual that the doctoral supervisor influences the doctoral candidate and forms her thinking and critical procedures. I hope I have been able to teach Ms Machová at least some of the arts of academic writing, but whatever debts she has incurred they far outweigh mine to her, as her influence on my own research has been enormous. For this I am extremely grateful that we have had the opportunity to work together.

In accordance with the Dean's Decree 17/2007/IV.e, I have no hesitation in recommending this thesis go forward to be defended.

doc. Justin Quinn Ph.D.