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**Benedetto Croce, *Philosophy, Poetry, History: an Anthology of Essays*.**

Translated by Cecil Sprigge.

London: Oxford University Press, 1966. lxxi + 1,135 pp. £5 5s.

Croce has been notoriously badly treated by his English translators. Ainslie, who translated eight of the major works, was simply incompetent. Even Collingwood, a sympathetic and perceptive interpreter, was at times inaccurate. Some of the most important books have never been translated at all, including *La poesia*, which he regarded as his definitive statement on aesthetics and literary criticism. It is not surprising then that scholars and critics outside the field of Italian studies are seldom familiar with his ideas, and that those who think they are frequently misrepresent him. Wimsatt and Beardsley, for example, in their essay on 'The Intentional Fallacy' which has acquired the status of a set text for students of literary theory, make the blunder of calling Croce a classic example of the 'intentionalist' way of thinking, whereas in fact Croce had identified the fallacy (though not named it) in terms startlingly similar to their own more than forty years before they did ('I fini dei poeti', 1905), and continued to warn against it throughout his life (e.g. in *Goethe*, 1919, p. 16). When a scholar as distinguished as Beardsley can make this kind of mistake, any attempt to make Croce's work more accessible to the English-speaking public must be welcomed.

Cecil Sprigge was evidently trying to do just this when he chose to translate the large Ricciardi anthology of Croce's essays *Filosofia. Poesia. Storia*. Unfortunately he died before finishing the task, and the English version now offered us by the Oxford University Press is incomplete. The dust-jacket tells us that we have 'the main part of an anthology known in Italy as "Croce in one volume",' suggesting that a judicious choice has been made, but in fact the book is simply truncated. The last 174 pages of the Italian collection are missing – just over five of the twelve main sections, although the later sections are much shorter than the earlier ones – including material of very great interest indeed: excerpts from *The History of Italy from 1871 to 1915*, essays on contemporary politics, and the invaluable 'Contributo alla critica di me stesso', which here appears with a 3-page conclusion written especially for this edition and not published elsewhere. Nor do the publishers explain the nature of the collection. It was prepared for Ricciardi by Croce himself, and as the publisher's note (also written by Croce) tells us, he preferred to choose short essays rather than long treatises as being more suitable for inclusion in an anthology. It is not surprising either that the choice was weighted towards his more recent work: there is little material here written before 1917, and nothing at all from *Estetica, Problemi di estetica, Breviario di estetica*, or *La letteratura della nuova Italia I-IV*, some of his most influential books. It is therefore misleading to speak of the book as 'Croce in one

volume' if this is meant to assure the English reader that everything he needs in order to understand Croce is here. However, the collection does contain a number of essays of a kind which have not been translated into English before – particularly the shorter critical essays and essays on critical theory – and one must be grateful to Sprigge for this reason.

The quality of the translation is disappointing. For convenience we can distinguish between content and form, and judge the translator on the separate but related issues of accuracy and style. In this case style provides a key to the question of accuracy. The most striking qualities of Croce's style are its superb ease, authority, urbanity and lucidity. His prose is always a pleasure to read. Sprigge fails completely to render these qualities. His prose is usually irritating, because stilted and unnatural, and sometimes difficult as well, not because he is dealing with difficult concepts but because he uses an artificial language at the farthest remove from simplicity. Croce habitually wrote in long sentences, whose many subordinate clauses and parentheses do not impede the powerful forward drive of the argument, so that in spite of the apparent complication he is always absolutely lucid. Admittedly it would be difficult to translate these sentences directly into English without substantial modification. Sprigge chooses to break them up into smaller units, so that often one sentence of the original becomes five or six in the translation. He presumably does this in the interests of clarity, but although superficially the articulation of the argument is made clearer, more is lost than is gained: the order in which the ideas were presented, the subordination of one to another and the relative weight given to each, and, most important of all, the tone, have been sacrificed. The second sentence on page one reads:

Ma, giunto ora a quell'età in cui, come cantava Giovanni Prati, vagano nell'anima 'l'alte malinconie del dí che fugge' (ed egli, per sua ventura, provò la malinconia, ma non, come noi, l'atroce tristezza del tramonto contornato da stragi e distruzioni di tutto quanto tenevamo caro e sacro al mondo), a quell'età in cui la vita trascorsa appare un passato che si abbraccia intero con lo sguardo e l'uomo si colloca nella 'storia' – ossia, per dirla con più povera parola, guarda a sé stesso come se già fosse morto, – voglio soffermarmi brevemente a rispondere a quanto pur vi ha di ragionevole e di discreto nella domanda anzidetta.

Sprigge translates:

However, at the age which I have now reached I am not unwilling to pause for a moment and to meet the request so far as may be done reasonably and discreetly. For at this (my present) age (said the poet Giovanni Prati) 'the profound melancholy of the fleeting days' invades the soul. Fortunate poet! He tasted such melancholy, but he was spared the cruel sadness of an evening of life set amid the ruin and destruction of what was dearest and holiest in our world. At this age one views

one's life as a Whole which has become visible to the backward-looking eye. One discerns one's place in history, and – putting the matter bluntly – looks upon oneself as though already dead.

Apart from the schoolboyish exclamation, and the clumsiness with which the quotation is introduced, the whole emotional balance of the passage has been lost. If there had been compensating gains one might not mind. But in fact, far from rendering Croce clearer, Sprigge consistently blurs the development of the argument by his use of an artificial and woolly English. One has to read many sentences twice in order to make anything of them at all: 'for what were there left in life for him had he no longer to labour thoughtfully in order to live manfully?' renders Croce's simple, lucid and unpretentious: 'non si vede che cos'altro farebbe se col pensiero non si travagliasse per vivere vita umana.' Still on page one we find that 'The special title of philosopher goes to him who shifts some such obstacle, great or small, dispels a cloud, pierces a gloom, with swift or slow, but in any case sure effects in heightening the tone of culture and of the moral life', where the mannered 'pierces a gloom' renders 'fuga una tenebra' and where 'in heightening the tone of' is a very dubious rendering of 'nel crescere d'intensità di.' Sometimes the expressions used are not English at all, and the misuse of words amounts to actual mistranslation. The distinction between imagination and fancy was as central to Croce's thought as it was to Coleridge's – but in Italian 'fantasia' is the genuine creative faculty and 'immaginazione' is the artificial combining power. The failure to grasp this distinction, and the applied uses of the word which stem from it, leads to some strange statements. In the essay on 'The Historic-Aesthetic Criterion' (why 'criterion' for 'interpretazione'?) we are told that scepticism in the aesthetic field 'springs from the imagination that on the one hand there are things, and on the other . . .', where 'imagination' evidently means 'mistaken notion', 'fanciful idea'. A few lines later we find that 'Thought is act, fancy is act', where 'fancy' should be 'imagination', linked in Croce's view with thought as the two basic modes of knowing. The two words recur constantly, and at every point at which they occur there is some falsification of meaning. Sometimes it is simply carelessness which makes a sentence unintelligible. One can make nothing of the statement that it is 'death for the world of poetry when it expires into the world of poetry and reality', until one checks against the original and finds that the second 'poetry' should read 'criticism'. Frequently, however, it is the translator's command of English which is at fault. He talks about art 'subdued and limited by a practical purpose, whatever that may be' where he means 'whatever it may be'. He consistently prefers the vaguer, wordier expression to the simpler one: 'nuovi aspetti' becomes 'aspects of fresh appearance'. The examples could be multiplied endlessly. The cumulative effect is rather like that of a film projected out of focus: one can follow what is going on, but nothing is sharp or clearly defined, and it soon becomes unbearably irritating. The dust-jacket tells us that Sprigge was a 'considerable stylist.' One wonders what the expression can possibly

mean.

The essays are preceded by a 70-page introductory study of Croce by Sprigge, first published as a monograph in 1952. A general introduction of this kind should prove valuable to the English reader, and the study is useful in setting Croce against the historical background. But there is information of an equally valuable kind which has been omitted. The Italian version contains a bibliographical appendix (again written by Croce himself) which gives a short description of his philosophical position and a chronological account of his principal publications, and a concordance which gives the name of the book from which each essay is taken. None of this appears in the English version. The English reader is told only the date of publication of each essay, and if he wants to follow up a particular argument or topic he has no way of doing so. Even the Index has been carelessly compiled. Under *Croce, Benedetto, Works* we find *Aesthteic (1902)* and *Aesthetic as the Science of Expression and as General Linguistics* appearing as if they were two separate works; the same essay appears (as it does in the Introduction) both as 'History Brought within the General Concept of Art' and as 'Inclusion of History under the General Idea of Art'; *The Philosophy of the Spirit* is included as if it were something different from the four volumes to which the general title is given; and a non-existent work (*Filosofia Economica*) is also solemnly listed. It is a great pity that Sprigge died before he could complete his work, and that there was nobody on hand to make sure that, irrespective of the missing essays, the English edition contained at least as much information as the Italian one, so that those who are inspired by the anthology to explore Croce's work more thoroughly – and the favourable critical reception the book received in the weeklies suggests that some of the exciting force of Croce's ideas comes through in spite of the faults of the translation – might be helped to do so.