

# Renæssanceforum

Tidsskrift for renæssanceforskning  
Journal of Renaissance studies

14

2018



ISSUES IN TRANSLATION  
THEN AND NOW:  
Renaissance theories and  
translation studies today

eds. Annet den Haan, Brenda Hosington,  
Marianne Pade and Anna Wegener

*Issues in Translation*, ed. Annet den Haan, Brenda Hosington, Marianne Pade and Anna Wegener

*Renaissanceforum* 14 • 2018

General Editor of *Renaissanceforum*: Camilla Horster

ISSN 1902-5041. URL: [www.renaissanceforum.dk/rf\\_14\\_2018.htm](http://www.renaissanceforum.dk/rf_14_2018.htm)

## Introduction

The present volume brings together several contributions to the question of establishing a dialogue between scholars of premodern translation and some current proponents of translation theory. It is hoped that this will mark an important step in what we believe is a badly needed yet mutually beneficial and enriching exchange between these two groups of specialists.

In January 2017, the Danish Academy in Rome hosted a two-day international colloquium entitled “Issues in Translation Then and Now: Renaissance theories and translation studies today”. Its aim was to contribute to a dialogue between the various theories of translation expressed in Renaissance (and to some degree medieval) treatises, commentary, and paratexts and those that are being discussed by scholars engaged in modern translation studies. Though both Renaissance and modern translation studies are rapidly expanding fields within the humanities, there seems to have been little contact between the two groups. Works on the history of translation often tend to ignore the complexity and diversity of Renaissance translation theory and practice – to the point that they often deny the existence of anything approaching a coherent or scientific translation theory prior to the nineteenth century. At the same time, current commentators on Renaissance translation theory and practice are not always completely conversant with modern theories of translation, which can often provide a different perspective by which to make judgements.

The reason for this may partly be the paradigm change in translation studies that has taken place over the last thirty years, from a *prescriptive* to a *descriptive* view. Since Renaissance theoreticians and practitioners almost exclusively discussed translations in normative terms, this shift may have resulted in widening the gap between their views and those of today’s translation specialists. In spite of this, the organisers of the colloquium believed that it was possible to bring them together by addressing certain issues of interest and concern to them both, and by maintaining that Renaissance theoreticians posed many of the same questions as those that occur in contemporary translation studies.

The participants in the colloquium were asked to focus primarily on some frequently recurring key issues in translation theory today, such as foreignization/domestication and notions of cultural translation, intertextuality, materiality, untranslatability, notions of authorial and textual hierarchy, and the status and ‘habitus’ of the translator. The essays in this volume reflect some of these topics, as well as the many lively discussions that took place during the colloquium.

Marianne PADE argues that from the beginning of the fifteenth century there was among Italian humanists a discussion of what we today would call *domesticating* vs. *foreignizing* translation. Using Lawrence Venuti's notions of fluency and transparency, she shows how leading humanists advocated and practised radically domesticating translation strategies during the first 50-60 years of the century – though there were always dissenting voices.

Réka FORRAI focuses on translation as *rewriting*. In her contribution, she argues that the concept of rewriting as discussed by Gérard Genette and the cultural translation theorist, André Lefevere, is also appropriate and useful for understanding the work of some medieval translators, as seen in her corpus of historiographical and hagiographical writers. Furthermore, it is also applicable for a Renaissance translator such as Bruni, as witnessed in his *Italian War against the Goths*.

Anna WEGENER's essay focuses on *intertextuality*. Employing a framework proposed by Lawrence Venuti, Wegener juxtaposes Leonardo Bruni's *On the Correct Way to Translate* with other modern translation theories. She analyses Bruni's treatise as a theory of intertextuality in translation. She also demonstrates that *On the Correct Way to Translate* is a seminal text, not only about translation, but also about retranslation.

Massimiliano MORINI's essay is also concerned with *intertextuality*. He addresses the question of why modern translation scholars have not, up until now, acknowledged the existence of early English translation theory and suggests that this has to do with its intertextual nature. Using twentieth-century notions of intertextuality and a corpus of paratexts accompanying various English translations, Morini is able to trace a web of theory that unites early modern England with the rest of Europe.

Annet DEN HAAN investigates how *translatability* was seen with regard to biblical translation during the Renaissance and in the twentieth century. She argues that the assumptions presented in Eugene Nida's influential 1964 *Toward a Science of Translating* about theology and translatability, although grounded in the linguistic and communication theories of his time and hailed by him as a new direction in biblical translation, are actually similar to those of Renaissance authors like Lorenzo Valla.

Andrea RIZZI investigates the strategies adopted by editors, translators and printers to make themselves visible to readers in early printed books. He applies approaches to the concepts of *visibility* and *agency* recently articulated by Mairi McLaughlin, Theo Hermans and Sharon Deane-Cox to analyse paratextual features of successive Italian editions and translations of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. He is also concerned with the *materiality* of these editions, *authorial hierarchy*, and the *status* of the translator.

The conference was organized by Brenda Hosington, Marianne Pade and Anna Wegener as part of the collaborative research project *Cultural Encounter as a Precondition of European Identity* ([www.acdan.it/projekter/ce/](http://www.acdan.it/projekter/ce/)), funded by the Carlsberg Foundation.

September 2018

Annet den Haan, Brenda Hosington, Marianne Pade and Anna Wegener,  
editors of *Renæssanceforum 14*.

**Table of Contents**

Marianne PADE, Greek into Humanist Latin: Foreignizing vs. domesticating translation in the Italian Quattrocento	1
Réka FORRAI, Translation as Rewriting: A modern theory for a pre-modern practice	23
Anna WEGENER, Translating with Books: Leonardo Bruni as a theorist of intertextuality in translation	41
Massimiliano MORINI, Intertextuality and Early Modern Translation Theory	63
Annet DEN HAAN, From Valla to Nida: Biblical translation in the Renaissance and the twentieth century	97
Andrea RIZZI, Editing and Translating Pliny in Renaissance Italy: Agency, collaboration and visibility	117

# GREEK INTO HUMANIST LATIN:



## Foreignizing vs. domesticating translation in the Italian Quattrocento

By Marianne Pade

*Abstract: Fifteenth-century Italy witnessed an explosion both in the production of Latin translations from the Greek and in theoretical writings on translations. Nevertheless, humanist translation theory is more or less ignored by many modern translation specialists. In this article I draw attention to some frequent issues in fifteenth-century discussions of translation that show how Renaissance theoreticians addressed a number of the same questions as those raised in contemporary translation studies, for instance by Antoine Berman, Lawrence Venuti and Anne Coldiron. From the beginning of the fifteenth century there was among Italian humanists a discussion of what we today would call domesticating versus foreignizing translation. The father of humanist translation theory, the Byzantine Manuel Chrysoloras, advocated some kind of foreignizing translation in which the foreignness of the source language would remain visible and the reader made to move towards the author. However, humanist theoreticians increasingly began to favour domesticating translation, even developing a new terminology to describe their aims and methods.*

In his *De latinae linguae reparatione*, a dialogue from the end of the 1480s, the Venetian Marcantonio Sabellico celebrates the triumph of humanism through the restoration of classical Latin eloquence.<sup>1</sup> Sabellico, who is himself one of the interlocutors, sums up the main achievements of major fifteenth-century humanists. The first to be praised is Leonardo Bruni:

### **Text 1**

However, of all who lived at that time, Leonardus Aretinus is worthy of special praise. He excelled both in philosophy and eloquence, and he was no less famous as a historian [...] There are various testimonies to his scholarship. His Latin versions of Greek texts clearly show his versatile intellect that could apply itself to differing

---

<sup>1</sup> For this, see Baker 2013 and Baker 2015, 184–233. For the dialogue, see also Krautter 1979, 635–646.

subjects. Sometimes he is weighty and condensed, as in his translations of Basil [...] and Xenophon's *Hiero*, and sometimes transparent and expansive as in the lives of Aemilius Paulus, Cato the Younger, Sertorius and the other Plutarchan lives he undertook. The result is such that there is nothing of worth in the original writer that he does not have too.<sup>2</sup>

Sabellico then remarks on how Bruni had rendered the stylistic qualities of other Greek authors whose works he had translated, before he mentions some of Bruni's original works.<sup>3</sup>

The paragraph on Bruni is no exception: if the writers included in the list had published any Latin translations, Sabellico considers them worthy of comment. With regard to Lorenzo Valla, for instance, pride of place is given to the *Elegantiae*, as one would expect in a work on the Latin language. However, as Sabellico stresses, Valla also followed his own precepts: with his translation of Herodotus, he so to speak made the ancient historian a Roman citizen, albeit one that might be surprised that the Muses had stopped speaking in Ionian (see below Text 2). Niccolò Perotti, who is hailed by Sabellico as second only to Valla as an authority on Latin, is praised for the clear and unrestrained style of his Latin Polybius and the gravity of his letters.<sup>4</sup> In short, in Sabellico's dialogue translation is invariably seen as a central part of the humanist project. Sabellico the critic not only mentions the translations of these humanists, he also discusses their individual merits. It seems that fifteenth-century translators were neither unnamed nor, as we shall see later, were they, in the literal sense of the word, invisible, thus standing in contrast to what modern translators have sometimes felt themselves to be.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> "Sed omnium qui sub id tempus extitere Leonardus Aretinus praecipua dignus laude occurrit, vir philosophiae studiis et eloquentia clarus, nec in historia minus celebris. [...] Studiorum monumenta varia feruntur; quae ex graeco latina fecit manifeste arguunt quam facilis natura illa fuerit diversisque rebus accommodata: gravis nunc et densus, ut in Basilio [...] et in Xenophontis Tyranno, nunc candidus ac fusus, ut in Aemilio, Catone, Sertorio et aliis quos ex Plutarcho acceperat, ut nulla sit in illo virtus quam in hoc aliquo modo desideres," SABELLICVS *repar* pp.99–100. When possible, I refer to Neo-Latin texts with the sigla used by Johann Ramminger in *Neulateinische Wortliste* ([www.neulatein.de](http://www.neulatein.de)).

<sup>3</sup> SABELLICVS *repar* pp.100–102.

<sup>4</sup> "Nicolaus vero Perotus, Sipontinus antistes, post Laurentium, quem velut homericum illum Achillem semper excipiendum duxi, omnium quos diximus latinae elegantiae longe studiosissimus merito habetur. Nihil ipsius Polybio candidius, nihil minus elaboratum, quum elaboratissima alioqui omnia apparent," SABELLICVS *repar* pp.133–134.

<sup>5</sup> I shall discuss this concept below in the paragraph entitled *Fluency, transparency and (in)visibility*.

Sabellico's emphasis on translation as part of a humanist's *œuvre* is perhaps not surprising. As Réka Forrai points out in her article in this volume, the Latin West produced many translations during the Middle Ages, but fifteenth-century Italy witnessed a veritable explosion in Latin translations from the Greek, as well as in metadiscursive texts on translation. From the late fourteenth century on, there was also a reorientation of Greek studies, as texts not traditionally read in the Latin West began to attract attention:<sup>6</sup> by the middle of the century, Greek texts from an impressive range of 'new' genres had become available to Western readers in Latin translation or rewriting, among them satire, biography, epic, historiography, and rhetoric.<sup>7</sup> These new developments profoundly influenced contemporary metadiscourse on translation, such as paratextual comments in prefaces or treatises.

In spite of this, modern translation studies tend to ignore or overlook developments in humanist translation theory. In *After Babel*, George Steiner divided the literature on the theory, practice and history of translation into four periods. The first lasted for more than 1800 years, extending from Cicero and Horace up to the publication of Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Essay on the Principles of Translation* in 1792.<sup>8</sup> More recently, Susan Bassnett stated that one of the first writers to formulate a theory of translation was the French humanist Etienne Dolet (1509–46) – in the mid-sixteenth century!<sup>9</sup> But not only was there a vivid interest in translation almost from the start of the humanist movement, there was actually a lot more at stake in humanist translation theory than the issues brought up in (Ps.) Cicero's *On the Best Kind of Orator* (§14), Horace's *Art of Poetry* (vv. 133–134) or Jerome's letter to Pammachius for that matter. Italian humanists discussed translation theory more than a hundred years before Dolet, whose treatise

---

<sup>6</sup> On the development of Greek studies in the second half of the fourteenth century, see DiStefano 1965 and 1968, the collected essays of Roberto Weiss in Weiss 1977, Hankins 2002, and the volume *Manuele Crisolora* 2002. See also Pade 2007, I, 66–96, Ciccolella 2008, 97–102

<sup>7</sup> With regard to the interest in Greek historiography, see Burke 1966, 135–152, and Pade & Osmond 1999, 154–165.

<sup>8</sup> Steiner 1975, 248–249. Steiner's rather high-handed treatment of humanist translation theory has been criticized, for instance, by Marassi 2009, 123.

<sup>9</sup> Bassnett 2014, 53. Dolet's treatise *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre*, was published in 1540. Incidentally, Eugene Nida, too, completely ignores the post-medieval Latin tradition in translation studies in his influential *Toward a Science of Translating*. In the chapter "The Tradition of Translation in the Latin World", he jumps from the twelfth century to Luther, mentioning also Dolet. Nida 1964, 14–16.

mentioned by Bassnett is in fact not much more than an abbreviated translation of a work by Leonardo Bruni.<sup>10</sup>

In what follows I shall highlight some frequent issues in fifteenth-century humanist writings on translation. I do not in any way purport to provide a panorama of humanist translation theory, but I hope to be able to show how Renaissance theoreticians addressed a number of the questions raised in contemporary translation studies. I also hope to demonstrate how reading the historical and the modern texts side by side may deepen our understanding of both. The concepts in modern translation studies that I have found especially helpful when reading humanist translation theory – and which I shall discuss in more detail later on – are: domesticating versus foreignizing translation (Friederich Schleiermacher, Lawrence Venuti, and Douglas Robinson), fluency, transparency and the invisibility of the translator (Venuti and Anne Coldiron), ethnocentric, annexionist translation (Antoine Berman and Venuti), stylistic analogue translation (Venuti), homophonic translation (Charles Bernstein), and equivalence (Eugene A. Nida and Venuti).

If we return to Sabellico's dialogue, what is remarkable is not just the prominence given to translation in a humanist's *œuvre*, it is also the way Sabellico judges individual translations. With both Bruni and Perotti he talks about the Latin style of the translation. This is important also in the case of Valla's Herodotus, but what is perhaps even more interesting is Sabellico's use of metaphors to convey the quality of Valla's work:

### **Text 2**

Read Herodotus, if you please, on whom *Valla* conferred citizenship. Let his spirit be called back from the Elysian fields and he himself be made to know Latin. Will he then deny that what he sees is his? Or will he acknowledge the rest as his own, especially the flowing style, but just wonder how it came about that the Muses, after whom he named his books, has stopped speaking Ionian?<sup>11</sup>

Sabellico here makes use of a widespread *topos* in humanist translation literature that is probably an allusion to Quintilian: the original author is given Roman citizenship, he gets to know Latin and somehow unlearns his

---

<sup>10</sup> Dolet's dependence on Bruni is discussed in Baldassarri 2003, 99 and n. 15.

<sup>11</sup> "Legite, si placet, Herodotum, quem ille civitate donavit: citentur ex Elisiis, ut poetae dicunt, campis ipsius Manes deturque latine scire; num negabit sua esse illa quae videat, an potius caetera agnoscens et in primis eximium candorem, tantum mirabitur Musas, quibus opus inscripserat, ionice desiisse loqui?" *SABELLICVS repar* pp.122–123.

mother tongue.<sup>12</sup> Or, to rephrase a famous sentence by the father of this notion in modern translation-studies discourse, Schleiermacher, the Greek author is not only moved towards his Latin readers, he moves in with them, whereas they do not move an inch to meet him.<sup>13</sup> What Sabellico describes is the result of what some would now call radical domestication. However, Sabellico wrote at the end of the fifteenth century; in the following I shall argue that in fact from the beginning of the century there was among Italian humanists a discussion of what we today, with the terminology coined by Lawrence Venuti, call domesticating versus foreignizing translation.<sup>14</sup>

### **Manuel Chrysoloras: a plea for foreignizing translation**

The Byzantine diplomat and scholar, Manuel Chrysoloras, may be called the father of humanist translation.<sup>15</sup> He taught Greek at Florence around 1400 and his successful tenure effectively changed the course of Greek studies in the West. We mainly know about his views on translation through a pupil of his, Cencio de' Rustici, whose short description is often treated as the founding document of humanist translation theory. Cencio recalls that Manuel thought literal translation worthless and a very free translation apt to interpret rather than translate the original. He recommended a middle course:

#### **Text 3**

Sed ad sententiam transferre opus esse aiebat hoc pacto ut ii qui huiusmodi rebus operam darent, legem sibi ipsis indicerent, ut nullo modo proprietates greca immutaretur.

(Instead one should render meaning, he said. Those who took pains with matters of this sort should make it a rule for themselves not to alter the Greek *proprietates* in any way.)<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> The metaphorical use of the expression *aliquem civitate donare* (to confer citizenship on someone) is also found in Quintilian: “ut oratio Romana plane videatur, non civitate donata,” (so that the style will seem completely Roman, and not to have been merely presented with Roman citizenship), QUINT. inst. 8,1,3. Sabellico, like Valla, was very fond of Quintilian, cp. Baker 2013, 211–212.

<sup>13</sup> In an 1813 lecture on different methods of translation, Schleiermacher famously said “there are only two. Either the translator leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible, and moves the author towards him.” Quoted from Lefevere 1977, 74.

<sup>14</sup> See Venuti’s influential *The Translator’s Invisibility. A History of Translation*, Venuti 1995/2008.

<sup>15</sup> My discussion of Chrysoloras is based on Pade 2017a.

<sup>16</sup> Cincius Romanus, Preface to translation of Aelius Aristides, *Dionysius*, Constance 1416, in Bertalot, 1929–30/1975, 2, 133.

The word that interests me here – and which I think is the key to understanding Chrysoloras’ point of view – is the one I have not translated, namely *proprietas*: the translator should do his outmost, “ut nullo modo proprietas greca immutaretur”. *Proprietas* is used once more in the same passage, when Cencio relates Manuel’s warnings against the overly free translation:

**Text 4**

nam si quispiam, quo luculentius apertiusque suis hominibus loquatur, aliquid grece proprietatis immutarit, eum non interpretis sed exponentis officio uti. (*ibid.*)

(For if anyone were to alter the Greek *proprietas* somehow, with the object of speaking better and more clearly to his own people, he would act the part of a commentator rather than that of a translator.)

Cencio’s wording in many respects echoes the classical *loci* on translation, especially (Ps) Cicero’s *On the best kind of orator* (§ 14), Horace’s *Art of Poetry* (vv. 133–134), and the passage in Jerome’s letter to Pammachius from which he quotes. But one word is odd, namely *proprietas*. Cencio uses it twice in five lines, but it is not in any of the three classical texts just mentioned.

According to the *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, the word *proprietas* has a wide range of meanings, but in grammatical and rhetorical contexts it is often used to signify the relationship between signified and signifier, and the way words used correctly may express the special characteristic of the thing they denote.<sup>17</sup> Some of the examples quoted by Ottink regard translation or differences between Greek and Latin: commenting upon his own inability to translate a passage in Plato, Aulus Gellius said that Latin cannot possibly hope to represent the *proprietas* of the Greek original accurately: “ad proprietates eorum nequaquam possit Latina oratio adspirare” (*Att.* 10,22,3). In his commentary on Psalm 54, Hilarius, bishop of Poitiers, remarked that the Latin *praecipita* did not express the *proprietas* of the Greek original (“proprietatem verbi [...] graeci [*sc.* καταπόντισον] latinitas [...] non elocuta est,” *HIL. in psalm.* 54, 11; Hilarius was commenting on the translation made from the old Greek version). Jerome mentioned that Lucas had realized that he would not be able to render properly the *proprietas* of the Hebrew *osianna* in the Gospel (“(*Lucas*) se vidit proprietatem sermonis [*sc.* ‘osianna’] transferre non posse,” *HIER. epist.* 20,4,4). Similarly, in the

---

<sup>17</sup> Ottink 2004, § B1aα: *de ratione, quae intercedit inter verba et res iis significatas: usu communi spectat ad verba proprie posita, quae res suas significant secundum naturam, notionem primariam.*

preface to his translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, Jerome again uses *proprietas* about a quality that is difficult or almost impossible to render in translation:

**Text 5**

Significatum est aliquid unius uerbi proprietate: non habeo meum quo id efferam, et dum quaero implere sententiam, longo ambitu uix breuis uiae spatia consummo, (HIER *chron. epist.* 2,6–9)

(A meaning may be conveyed by the *proprietas* of a single word: but in my vocabulary I have no comparable word; and when I try to accommodate the full sense, I take a long detour around a short course.)<sup>18</sup>

In the examples quoted here, *proprietas* is used about a quality of the original, not just the actual phrasing, but also the concept it denotes. In the Gellius quotation, it seems to refer mostly to the wording, whereas in the two examples from Jerome it rather denotes the concept. I believe that this is how the word is also used by Chrysoloras/Cencio, that is, to denote the Greek innate quality or the special Greek characteristic of the original, both with regard to phrasing and content. According to Chrysoloras/Cencio, the *proprietas graeca* may be almost impossible to render in Latin, but one must none the less attempt to maintain it at all costs.

Even though it is so prominent in Cencio's text, the word *proprietas* did not really become a stable part of the lexicon of humanist translation studies. The reason for this, I believe, is that subsequent translation theoreticians, with Leonardo Bruni leading the way, were far more focused on the target language or culture. Or in other words, I believe that Chrysoloras, who was a proud representative of Greek culture, advocated what we today would call a foreignizing translation that would keep as many as possible of the Greek original's characteristics. The one translation into Latin we have of his, the version of Plato's *State* which he undertook in collaboration with Uberto Decembrio, bears witness to this.<sup>19</sup> All technical terms for political institutions are left in transliteration, with no attempt to find a Latin equivalent. Chrysoloras' Italian followers, on the other hand, more intent on enriching humanist Latin culture, wanted to import the original into that culture, that is to produce totally domesticating translations. They actually developed a new vocabulary and refined imagery to describe their goal.

---

<sup>18</sup> Translation based on Copeland 1991, 47.

<sup>19</sup> For this translation, see Hankins 1987.

### **Leonardo Bruni: a call for domesticating translation**

Leonardo Bruni, perhaps Chrysoloras' most successful student, wrote repeatedly about translation. It has sometimes been assumed that he more or less systematized and expanded upon Chrysoloras' theory to which he had been exposed during classes. However, though Bruni agrees with Chrysoloras in several respects he also demonstrates important differences. Some critics see Bruni as an adherent of almost literal translation, but I cannot agree with that.<sup>20</sup> It is true that in his famous 1404 letter to Niccolò Niccoli that came to function as a preface to his translation of Plato's *Phaedo*, he says that if possible he willingly renders the Greek original word for word. However, I believe that the operative term here is 'if possible', for Bruni stresses that a literal translation must only be attempted if the result is without awkwardness or harshness.<sup>21</sup> Chrysoloras actually warned against word for word translation, because the result would be harsh, so I think we may safely conclude that Bruni here is in line with his views. However, where Chrysoloras said that good translation should at all cost maintain the *proprietas graeca*, Bruni heads in another direction. In an often-quoted passage, he describes Plato's stylistic qualities at length saying that this is how Plato is in Greek, and that is what he will try to import into the Latin world, because

#### **Text 6**

Plato himself asks me to do that, for a man who among the Greeks presented a most elegant countenance surely does not want to appear crude and clumsy among the Latins.<sup>22</sup>

Some years later, in the 1417 preface to his Latin translation of Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, Bruni uses similar imagery to explain why a new translation of the text was needed:

#### **Text 7**

If *Aristotle* now has any idea about what is going on here, one must assume that he has long been enraged at the harshness and awkwardness of the [medieval] translation and that, offended by such

---

<sup>20</sup> For instance Marassi 2009, 125.

<sup>21</sup> "Deinde si verbum verbo sine ulla inconcinnitate, aut absurditate reddi potest, libentissime omnium id ago," BRVNI *ep* 1,8 M. = 1,1 L.

<sup>22</sup> "hoc enim ipse Plato praesens me facere jubet, qui cum elegantissimi oris apud Graecos sit, non vult certe apud Latinos ineptus videri," BRVNI *ep* 1,8 M. = 1,1 L. For a discussion of Bruni's letter in the context of humanist translation theory, see Pade 2016, 3–8.

barbarism, he denies the books are his. For he wants to appear among the Latins as he showed himself to the Greeks.<sup>23</sup>

As James Hankins put it: “Bruni wanted to pull his Greek author into the Latin world, to imagine how he would have written had Latin been his native language”.<sup>24</sup> That had definitely not happened with the medieval translation, with its uncouth, barbarous Latin. One kind of barbarism, or foreignizing aspect of the medieval translation that Bruni repeatedly criticizes is the transliteration of Greek words. For instance, in his treatise on correct translation from the 1420s, Bruni explicitly warns against leaving anything in Greek in the translation.<sup>25</sup>

It is probably in the 1404 letter to Niccoli, in the same passage as the one quoted above (see Text 6), that Bruni first coined a hugely successful neologism of sense, namely *traducere* for to translate, a meaning the verb never had in ancient Latin. In the earliest texts where Bruni uses *traducere* in this way, the metaphor is still clearly visible, as it is here:

#### **Text 8**

ego autem Platoni adhaereo quem ego ipse mihi effinxi et quidem latine scientem, ut iudicare possit, testemque eum adhibeo traductionis sue, atque ita traduco ut illi maxime placere intelligo.

(I stay close to Plato – I have imagined him knowing Latin, so that he can form his own judgement, and I use him as an authoritative witness of his move [*into Latin*]; and I lead him over [*into Latin, i.e., translate*] as I understand pleases him best.)<sup>26</sup>

#### **Spatial metaphors and domesticating translation**

It could be said that one of the most important coinages in fifteenth-century humanist Latin, *traducere* as used by Bruni, does itself announce the stance many humanists had towards translation: the foreign text should be imported into their world, it should be domesticated. Bruni and many other humanist translators clearly preferred the second of Schleiermacher’s

---

<sup>23</sup> “si quis illi nunc sensus est rerum nostrarum, iam pridem credendum est <eum> huic absurditati et inconcinnitati traductionis infensum et tantam barbariem indignatum hos suos libros esse negare, cum talis apud Latinos videri cupiat, qualem apud Graecos sese ipse exhibuit,” BRVNI *praef. Aristoteles eth Nicom* p. 158. *Eum* is added by Baron 1928, 77.

<sup>24</sup> James Hankins in Griffiths, Hankins & Thompson 1987, 10.

<sup>25</sup> “ut [...] non mendicet illud aut mutuo sumat aut in Graeco relinquat ob ignorantiam Latini sermonis,” BRVNI *interpr* p.85. Bruni wrote the treatise between 1424 and 1426.

<sup>26</sup> For Bruni’s coinage, see Ramminger 2015-2016. I here quote Ramminger’s translation of the passage, *ibid.* p. 38.

translation strategies: they moved the author towards the reader (see above n. 13).

Spatial metaphors similar to that inherent in *traducere* are frequent in fifteenth-century writings on translation: Guarino Veronese said that Chrysoloras led Greek letters, which had long been exiled from Latium, back to the Latins,<sup>27</sup> and Guarino himself, in his translation of Plutarch's *Lysander & Sulla*, leads the eponymous heroes from Athens to Ferrara,<sup>28</sup> while in his translation of Plutarch's *Philopoemen*, he makes the Greek join the other half of the Plutarchan pair, Flaminius, of whose company he had previously robbed Philopoemen.<sup>29</sup> Francesco Barbaro, too, in his translation of Plutarch's life leads Cato back from exile and gives Aristides, the Greek half of the pair, both Roman citizenship and Latin literacy.<sup>30</sup> Later in the century Alamanno Rinuccini makes the Spartan king Agesilaus come to the Latins.<sup>31</sup> A more brutal variant of the image of citizenship is found in the military imagery used by Lorenzo Valla with regard to his Latin translation of Thucydides: he compares himself, and the other translators employed by Pope Nicholas V, to commanders sent out by a Roman emperor to subject a new province to Roman rule.<sup>32</sup> The desired result of this domesticating process is described beautifully by Nicholas himself in a letter where he praises Niccolò Perotti's Latin translation of Polybius: the translation was so excellently done that Polybius' *Histories* seemed never to have been Greek!<sup>33</sup>

### **In favour of foreignization**

There were, however, dissenting voices. The writers I have quoted so far all belong to the core group of fifteenth-century humanists, but other

---

<sup>27</sup> "(Chrysoloras,) qui profugas dudum ex Latio litteras grecas ex innata liberalitate reducens ad nostrates", GVARINO *praef Plutarch vitae* 18,1, c. 1412.

<sup>28</sup> "Duo illustres uiri ..., Lysander et Sulla comes, quos mediis ex Athenis tibi deduco," GVARINO *praef Plutarch vitae* 12,1, a. 1435.

<sup>29</sup> "*Philopoemen* meam tacitus implorare fidem uisus est, ut cum superiori tempore Titum Flaminium aequalem suum et honoris aemulum Latinum fecissem et socium distraxissem, solum ac destitutum se nequamquam esse paterer," GVARINO *praef Plutarch vitae* 8,1, a. 1416–18.

<sup>30</sup> "intra paucos dies Aristidem [...] non ciuitate sed quod amplius est Latinis litteris donare, et Catonem illum grauissimum longo ut aiunt postliminio ad nostros homines reducere mihi licuerit," BARBARO-F *praef Plutarch vitae* 9,1, a. 1416.

<sup>31</sup> "Plutarchi Agesilaum, tuo nomine ad Latinos uenientem," RINVCINI *praef Plutarch vitae* 17,1, a. 1462.

<sup>32</sup> See Pade 2016, 3.

<sup>33</sup> "Tanta enim facilitate et eloquentia transfers ut historia ipsa nunquam graeca sed prorsus latina semper fuisse uideatur", Nicholas V, letter to Perotti, 29.8.1452, quoted from Vat. lat. 1808, f. 1v.

intellectual communities clearly had different standards. A well-known example of this is the fierce opposition to Leonardo Bruni's 1417 translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Referring to Cicero's praise of Aristotle's stylistic qualities, Bruni had translated the work into elegant, Ciceronian Latin, in the process dispensing with the technical vocabulary of the medieval translation, and with it the transliterated terms for Greek political institutions. This was implicitly an attack on the scholastics, who based their teaching on the existing translations, like for instance the thirteenth-century translation of the *Ethics* by Robert Grosseteste. In a heated exchange of letters, Alonso of Cartagena, bishop of Burgos, accused Bruni's translation of lacking philosophical precision, exactly because it gave up on the Greek technical vocabulary, aiming to supplant it with perfectly idiomatic Latin. To Alonso, Latinity was less important than unequivocal terminology, foreign or not.<sup>34</sup> But also writers that we today count as humanists could argue that foreignization was an option. One of Guarino's very first translations was of Isocrates' *To Demonicus* (1405), a very popular political treatise. Citing Quintilian who had acknowledged this procedure amongst the ancients, Guarino admitted in his preface that he was prepared to retain Greek words in his translations if Latin equivalents were not available, for instance *monarchia* or *democratia*.<sup>35</sup> Like Bruni, Guarino was a student of Chrysoloras' and perhaps an even greater admirer of his teacher. Though Guarino on occasion would experiment with extremely domesticating translation strategies (see below Text 11), for a political text like *To Demonicus* he accepted the use of transliterated technical vocabulary, although the effect would be foreignizing. Moreover, Guarino actually coined a number of very successful loanwords from the Greek that he first used in translations. One is still with us in, I believe, most European languages, namely *myriad* meaning 10.000 or 'an indefinitely great number'. Guarino first used it in 1412 and considerably announced the novelty in the margin of the manuscript.<sup>36</sup>

I suspect further studies may reveal that the humanists' views on domesticating versus foreignizing translation strategies tended to vary

---

<sup>34</sup> For the controversy, see Hankins 2001 and 2003.

<sup>35</sup> GVARINO *ep* 1,5, quoting Quintilian *inst.* 1,5,8: "et concessis quoque graecis, inquit, utimur verbis, ubi nostra desint" (and we admittedly use Greek words where no Latin terms are available). On Guarino's views, see McLaughlin 1995, 117. It is almost tautological to say that humanist translators generally agree with Bruni's views on Latin style as a criterion of value. Regarding the vexed question of what actually constitutes the core characteristic of Renaissance humanism, modern scholarship increasingly points to the linguistic focus of the movement. There is an important discussion of this in Baker 2015, 234–240.

<sup>36</sup> Pade 2006, 255–256.

according to the genre in question. However, many of the new popular genres – historiography, epideictic rhetoric, biography – seemed to call for strongly domesticating translation, and the humanist translators were often very good at it, as we saw with Perotti’s Latin Polybius that “seemed never to have been Greek” (see above n. 33). This appropriative attitude towards the Greek cultural heritage did not go unnoticed among the Greeks themselves. In fact, representatives of the source culture protested about the ‘ethnocentric’ violence, to use Venuti’s term, their authors were subjected to.<sup>37</sup> One of them was Michael Apostolis, an impoverished Greek teacher, who indignantly wrote that:

**Text 9**

if someone were to say that the Italian teachers translate Greek into their own language and manner very ably and appropriately, what does this have to do with the Greeks and their learning? It is rather a great offence which deserves strong penalties. In this way they are trying gradually to obliterate the Greek language, and have practically made the Greeks into Romans.<sup>38</sup>

Other modern scholars have discussed ‘ethnocentric’ violence in translation: Antoine Berman talked about “ethnocentric, annexionist translations [...] where the play of deforming forces is freely exercised.”<sup>39</sup> Economic interest may easily lead first-world translators and publishers to adopt an ‘annexionist’ approach towards the texts of ‘postcolonial’ writers. Taking her own translation of Raja’ al-Sani’s *Banat al-Riyadh (Girls of Riyadh)* as a case study, Marilyn Booth argued that revisions made to her translation in the course of publication had domesticated the text and toned down the social criticism posed in the novel.<sup>40</sup>

**Fluency, transparency and (in)visibility**

What Apostolis called obliterating the Greek language and making the Greeks into Romans (see Text 9) would in modern translation studies be

---

<sup>37</sup> Venuti 1995/2008, 16.

<sup>38</sup> “Εἰ δέ τις φαίη τοὺς Ῥωμαίων πορθμέας εὐθέτως καὶ ὡς προσήκει διερμηνεῦειν τὸν Ἕλληνα ἐς τὴν σφετέραν φώνην τε καὶ συνήθειαν, τί τοῦτο πρὸς Ἑλληνας καὶ σοφίαν αὐτῶν; μᾶλλον μὲν οὖν καὶ ἀδικία μεγίστη καὶ πολλῶν ἀξία τιμωρίων. τούτῳ δὴ τῷ τρόπῳ κατὰ μικρὸν τάκειναι ἀφανίζεῖν ἐπιχειροῦσι, καὶ οὕτως ἀνθ’ Ἑλλήνων ὅσον οὐκ ἦδη Ῥωμαίους πεποιήκασι,” quoted from Botley 2004, 168. English translation by Paul Botley, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Berman 1985/2004, 278.

<sup>40</sup> See Booth 2008. Her translation was published by Penguin in 2007.

called transparency. According to Venuti, this is achieved in a translation when

**Text 10**

the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text – the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the 'original'. The illusion of transparency is an effect of a fluent translation strategy, of the translator's effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning [...] the effect of transparency conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator's crucial intervention. The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text.<sup>41</sup>

Whereas modern translation critics, and not least Venuti, have repeatedly encouraged visibility in translation and felt that foreignization should be a way to proceed, humanist translators generally did not feel the need, perhaps because of the extraordinary prestige they enjoyed.<sup>42</sup> As Coldiron recently pointed out, there have been moments in the history of translation where visibility was in fact promoted, among them the early modern period, when the admiration for *imitatio* and stylistic brilliance drew readers' attention to the translators' ability.<sup>43</sup> However, humanist translators were keenly aware that transparency, "the appearance that *a translation* reflects the foreign writer's personality" (see above Text 10), was an illusion and they addressed the question of how to create it. They certainly aimed at fluency, but they expected readers to recognize the skill it took to achieve it. In the following I shall discuss two translation strategies that have been explored both by contemporary and humanist translators, but viewed slightly differently in the two periods. The two examples tell us, I believe, that the risk of invisibility was perceived as less imminent by humanist translators.

In his 2002 translation of the Italian poet Antonia Pozzi, Venuti introduced the 'stylistic analogue'. He postulated an analogy between her work and some contemporary Anglo-American writers, exploiting the

---

<sup>41</sup> Venuti 1995/2008, 1.

<sup>42</sup> The notion of invisibility and, by implication, visibility in translation is introduced in Venuti 1995. Subsequently, the concept came to play an important role in the field of translation studies, as shown by Emmerich 2013.

<sup>43</sup> Coldiron 2012, 190.

analogy on both the visual and phonetic levels in his translation.<sup>44</sup> However, the notion of the stylistic analogue may also, I feel, be seen as radically domesticating, and if we examine the way it was used in humanist translation, I believe it was.

When Bruni tries to explain the stylistic grasp translators ought to have with regard to both source and target language, he illustrates his points by describing the distinctive style of three Roman writers his readers would be utterly familiar with, namely Cicero, Sallust and Livy.<sup>45</sup> The good translator would be able to preserve or, rather, impose that style. Subsequent translators would accept the obligation of initial stylistic analysis, and the solution of how to render the original's stylistic characteristics could be the 'stylistic analogue': if an analogy was known to exist between the Greek work and a Latin author, that author could be imitated in the translation. In the preface to his 1452 translation of Thucydides, Lorenzo Valla quotes Cicero's and Quintilian's analysis of Thucydides' style, adding that Sallust was known to have been an imitator of the Greek historian. In the translation itself, Valla in fact often renders Thucydides' Greek with analogous phrases from Sallust, sometimes even remarking upon the procedure in the margin of his manuscript.<sup>46</sup> Valla clearly wanted readers to recognize and admire the intertextuality between his translation and its hypotext.<sup>47</sup> Guarino Veronese provides us with another and rather radical example of this procedure. In 1427 he translated part of Homer's *Odyssey* for a friend, to whom he explained that

#### **Text 11**

some [*of the lines*] I translated almost literally, but there were passages where I more or less summed up the content, as I have seen that our Virgil often did.<sup>48</sup>

Virgil of course was known for his imitation of Homer, so to use his style was to use a 'stylistic analogue' and the result would have been a radically domesticated version of the passage in Homer.

Douglas Robinson has argued that 'radical domestication' would make readers aware of the interpretative work that translation involves – and thus

---

<sup>44</sup> Pozzi 2002.

<sup>45</sup> BRUNI *interpr.* p.87.

<sup>46</sup> Pade 2010 and 2016, 8–9.

<sup>47</sup> For intertextuality in translation, see Pade 2013, 31–33 and 2014, 357–360 and the essays by Morini and Wegener in this collection.

<sup>48</sup> "nonnulla ex verbo ferme converti, quaedam summatim exposui, quod a Virgilio nostro factitatum animadverti," GVARINO *ep.* 408 (*a.* 1427). For Guarino's stance in the letter, see Pade 2014, 354–355.

highlight the role of the translator.<sup>49</sup> In this light it is interesting that both Valla and Guarino proudly announced their translation strategies to their readers, revealing the complex analysis that had led to the finished translation. Robinson traced the genealogy of this approach back to include Martin Luther's treatment of the New Testament in German. However, Luther's famous *Sendbrieff* owes much to fifteenth-century Italian translation theory.<sup>50</sup> For a humanist translator, 'radical domestication', as we have seen, necessarily involves *imitation* (see for instance Text 11). The strategy is described in many humanist texts on translation, and it is easy to find examples of it in practice.

The second strategy I want to draw attention to is the so-called 'homophonic translation' that aims at fidelity to the aural aspect of the original. 'Homophonic translation' is now seen as something that destabilizes notions of transparency or unproblematic equivalence in translation, thus making the translator more visible.<sup>51</sup> Again, this strategy was at least tentatively explored in humanist translation. Confident that the expressive powers of Latin easily equal those of Greek, Bruni not only required the good translator to take prose rhythm and literary polish into consideration, he also showed how, in a passage from Plato's *Phaedrus* (237b), he was able exactly to render in Latin the prose rhythm of the original.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, for Bruni 'homophonic translation' did not in any way problematize equivalence, but I am certain that he would expect readers to recognize this *tour de force*; the brilliance of the translator would not go unnoticed.

### Reception

Some of the strategies explored by humanist translators – imitation (see above Text 11), *aemulatio* (see below Text 13), intertextuality (see above and n. 47) – involved a notable degree of independence *vis à vis* the original, privileging the role of the translator over the author. They also involved a keen awareness of the reception of the original. For Venuti the fact that a text accrues significance when it begins to circulate in its original culture is an insurmountable obstacle that prevents a translation from producing on its reader an effect even similar to that produced by the original on the source-culture reader. Layers of significance are created through a variety of media

---

<sup>49</sup> Robinson 1997, 95.

<sup>50</sup> Pade 2016, 17.

<sup>51</sup> Bernstein 2011.

<sup>52</sup> BRUNI *interp* p.87–89. On Bruni's discussion of prose rhythm in translation see also Baldassarri 2003, 100 and Pade forthcoming.

“ranging from paratextual elements [...] to commentary [...] to derivative works [...]” The accumulated significance

### **Text 12**

is necessary for the signifying process of the foreign text, for its capacity to support meanings, values, and functions which therefore never survive intact the transition to a different language and culture. Thus the notion of an equivalent effect – that a translation can produce for its reader an effect that is similar to or the same as the effect produced by the foreign text for the foreign language reader – describes an impossibility: it ignores the manifold loss of contexts in any translation.<sup>53</sup>

Other scholars have argued differently, notably Eugene Nida, who talked about dynamic equivalence that was the “quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors.”<sup>54</sup>

I do not know of any reflections in humanist translation theory on the possibility, or impossibility, of a translation taking into account a text’s reception in its original culture – though translators often consulted Greek commentaries or glosses pertaining to the text they worked on: Bruni, for instance, studied Byzantine commentaries for his translations on Aristotle and Valla even translated Greek glosses into his Latin Thucydides and Greek commentaries into the margins of his manuscript.<sup>55</sup> But many Greek texts had had a notable reception in classical Latin literature, and here the situation is very different indeed. I have already mentioned how Valla explained some of his translation choices by pointing out Sallust’s imitation of Thucydides, a trait that was often remarked upon by Roman literary criticism. Likewise, in the preface to his translation of Polybius, Niccolò Perotti discussed Livy’s extended use of the Greek historian, also describing some of their stylistic differences. One is that whereas Polybius preferred indirect discourse, Livy favoured direct speech. In his translation, then, Perotti endeavours to take into account the Livian adaptation of Polybius’ style, on occasion transforming the Greek indirect discourse into direct speech, even adding apostrophes. In the case of Thucydides and Polybius, their reception in Roman literature explains some stylistic features in the

---

<sup>53</sup> Venuti 2009, 159.

<sup>54</sup> Nida & Taber 1969, 200. Nida would later talk about functional equivalence.

<sup>55</sup> Bruni studies the Byzantine commentator Eustratius, cp. Hankins 2003, 199. For Valla’s translation of Greek glosses, see Pade 2000, 271–276.

translations themselves.<sup>56</sup> When, some years before the Thucydides, Valla took on Demosthenes' masterpiece, *Pro Ctesiphonte* (*On the crown*), he clearly saw the ancient and modern reception of the text not just as a layer of meaning to be taken into account, but as a challenge.<sup>57</sup> It was then believed that Cicero had translated it, and Valla was of course aware of Bruni's 1407/1421 version. He acknowledged Bruni's mastery as a translator, admiringly saying that where he had surpassed all others in his earlier translations, in the *Pro Ctesiphonte* he had surpassed himself.<sup>58</sup> However, that only spurred Valla to greater efforts and he set out to compete with three great orators, Leonardo Bruni, Cicero, and Demosthenes:<sup>59</sup>

### **Text 13**

[I emulate] Leonardo, intending to reach the same goal by a different road; Cicero, hoping to steer the same course as he claimed to have done; and Demosthenes, to make sure that, if at all possible, he is not, through me, made to speak Latin any worse than he spoke Greek on his own.<sup>60</sup>

Neither Thucydides, nor Polybius, nor Demosthenes was read in the Latin West during the Middle Ages, but Aristotle certainly was. Not only were his works discussed in classical Roman literature, large parts of his *œuvre* were extant in medieval Latin translations, and there was a huge corpus of commentaries. All this, I believe, is reflected in Bruni's translations from

---

<sup>56</sup> Pade 2008, 87 and 96–98, and Pade 2016, 10–11.

<sup>57</sup> For Valla's translation of the speech, see Lo Monaco 1986 and 2008.

<sup>58</sup> "Ita enim fere constat, in aliis translationibus a Leonardo omnes, in hac autem etiam ipsum a se fuisse superatum. Adeo omnem vim Demosthenis nitoremque expressit et quemadmodum si Ciceronis extaret illa conversio hic non scripsisset, ita post se scribendum non esse<t>, qui fecit ne Tullianam magnopere desideremus," Lo Monaco 1986, 162. For Bruni's translation, see Accame Lanzillotta 1986.

<sup>59</sup> The spurious *De optimo genere oratorum* (current as early as Asconius) presents itself as Cicero's preface to his translation of the *Pro Ctesiphonte* and the opposing speech by Aeschines – also translated by Bruni. The famous passage, "Converti enim ex Atticis duorum eloquentissimorum nobilissimas orationes inter seque contrarias, Aeschini et Demostheni; nec converti ut interpres, sed ut orator, sentiis isdem et earum formis tamquam figuris, verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis," (*opt. gen.* 14), was quoted *verbatim* in St Jerome's letter to Pammachius (§ 5).

<sup>60</sup> "nunc ad emulationem trium maximorum oratorum me exerco: Leonardi, Ciceronis, Demosthenis. Leonardi quidem ut alio itinere secum ad metam perveniam; Ciceronis vero, ut quem cursum tenuisse se dicit eundem ego teneam; Demosthenis autem ut non peius loquatur per me latine, si fas est, quam per se grece," Lo Monaco 1986, 163. As stated by Regoliosi 2001, 456–461 it is the *emulatio* of the original that for Valla makes translation a worthwhile exercise.

Aristotle. It is well known how he defended the high rhetorical style of his translation of the *Ethics* by pointing out that Cicero had praised Aristotle's style.<sup>61</sup> He deliberately rejected many aspects of the medieval translations, but consistently adopted the terminology of scholastic commentaries for political institutions.<sup>62</sup> In doing so he preserved in his translation one layer of meaning accumulated by Aristotle's text in its long life.

### Conclusions

Humanist translation theory, and practice, clearly addressed some of the same issues that loom large in modern translation studies, for example, foreignizing versus domesticating translation, and strategies to achieve transparency, such as the stylistic analogue. Visibility, however, such a concern for Lawrence Venuti, is rarely mentioned by humanist translators. There is probably a good reason for that. As is clear from Sabellico's *On the restoration of Latin* that I mentioned at the beginning of this article (see Texts 1 and 2), translation and translators were held in high esteem in fifteenth-century Italy. Translators announced their translation strategies in prefaces, letters, treatises, and in commentaries on their own translations. They openly proclaimed the creativity of the translator, the *inventio* involved in his work, and they even, as we saw with Valla, worked in open competition with the original. From a material viewpoint, too, fifteenth-century translators were definitely visible. We find their portraits in manuscript copies of the work, sometimes with, but perhaps more often without a portrait of the original author, and many contemporary manuscripts contain collections of translations by a specific humanist, rather than translations of a specific author.<sup>63</sup> There was hardly any need to fight invisibility.

---

<sup>61</sup> "Atqui studiosum eloquentiae fuisse Aristotelem et dicendi artem cum sapientia coniunxisse et Cicero ipse multis in locis testatur et libri eius summo cum eloquentiae studio luculentissime scripti declarant," BRVNI praef *Aristoteles eth Nicom.*

<sup>62</sup> For this see, Pade 2017b. However, Bruni may have been convinced that the terminology was classical, cp. BRVNI *ep* 10,24 M.

<sup>63</sup> It is easy to find manuscript copies of translations with the translators' portrait in the marvellous collection of digitized manuscripts published by the Vatican Library: <http://www.mss.vatlib.it/gui/scan/link.jsp>. One example is Urb. lat. 337 with Lorenzo Valla's Latin version the *Pro Cthesiphonte*, another is Urb. lat. 449 that contains Pier Candido Decembrio's Latin translation of Appianus. In both manuscripts, the portrait of the translator is in the illuminated initial of the dedicatory letter. Examples of manuscripts containing collections of translations by a specific humanist may be found in Pade 2007, II, in the chapter "List of Manuscripts Containing Latin Translations of Plutarch's Lives and related texts". See for example BERLIN, Staatsbibliothek, Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, lat. fol. 495, and lat. qu. 451, both with translations by Bruni.

### Bibliography

- Accame Lanzillotta, Maria 1986, *Leonardo Bruni traduttore di Demostene: La "Pro Ctesiphonte"*, Genova (*Publicazioni dell' Istituto di Filologia Classica e Medievale* 96).
- Baker, Patrick 2013, "A Labyrinth of Praise and Blame: On the Form and Structure of Marcantonio Sabellico's *De latinae linguae reparatione*", *Historiographie des Humanismus. Literarische Verfahren, soziale Praxis, geschichtliche Räume*, eds.: Johannes Helmuth, Albert Schirrmeyer & Stefan Schlelein, Berlin (*Transformationen der Antike* 12), 209–240.
- Baker, Patrick 2015, *Italian Renaissance Humanism in the Mirror*, Cambridge.
- Baldassarri, Stefano 2003, *Umanesimo e traduzione da Petrarca a Manetti*, Cassino (*Dimore* 5).
- Baron, Hans 1928, *Leonardo Bruni Aretino. Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften; mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe*, Leipzig & Berlin (*Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance* 1).
- Bassnett, Susan 2014, *Translation Studies*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., London & New York.
- Berman, Antoine 1985/2004, "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign", *The Translation Studies Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed.: Lawrence Venuti, New York & Abingdon, 276–289.
- Bernstein, Charles 2011, "Breaking the translation curtain: The homophonic sublime", *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions*, ed.: Charles Bernstein, Chicago, 199–202.
- Bertalot, Ludwig 1929–30/1975, "Cincius Romanus und seine Briefe", *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, XXI, 209–255, now *id.* 1975, *Studien zum italienischen und deutschen Humanismus* 1-2, ed.: Paul O. Kristeller, Roma, 131–180.
- Booth, Marilyn 2008, "Translator v. author (2007)", *Translation Studies* 1,2, 197–211.
- Botley, Paul 2004, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti and Desiderius Erasmus*, Cambridge.
- Burke, Peter 1996, "A Survey of the Popularity of Ancient Historians, 1450–1700", *History and Theory* 5,2, 135–152.
- Ciccolella, Federica 2008, *Donati Graeci. Learning Greek in the Renaissance*, Leiden & Boston.
- Coldiron, Anne E.B. 2012, "Visibility now: Historicizing foreign presences in translation", *Translation Studies* 5,2, 189–200.

- Copeland, Rita 1991, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Translation in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge.
- DiStefano, Giuseppe 1965, “La découverte de Plutarque en France au début du XVe siècle”, *Romania* 86, 463–519.
- DiStefano, Giuseppe 1968, *La découverte de Plutarque en occident. Aspects de la vie intellectuelle en Avignon au XIVe siècle*, Torino (*Memorie dell'Accademia delle scienze di Torino. Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche* 4,5,18).
- Dolet, Etienne 1540, *La manière de bien traduire d'une langue en aultre. D'avantage de la punctuation de la langue françoise, plus des accents d'ycelle*, Lyon.
- Emmerich, Karen R. 2013, “Visibility (and Invisibility)”, *Handbook of Translation Studies* vol. 4, Amsterdam, 200–206.
- Griffiths, Gordon, James Hankins & David Thompson 1987, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, Binghamton, NY (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 46).
- Hankins, James 1987, “A Manuscript of Plato's Republic in the Translation of Chrysoloras and Uberto Decembrio with annotations of Guarino Veronese (Reg. lat. 1131)”, *Supplementum Festivum. Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, eds.: James Hankins, John Monfasani, & Frederick Purnell jr., Binghamton, NY (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 49), 149–188.
- Hankins, James 2001, “Notes on Leonardo Bruni's Translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and its Reception in the Fifteenth Century”, *Les traducteurs au travail: Leurs manuscrits et leurs méthodes. Actes du Colloque international organisé par le “Ettore Majorana Centre for Scientific Culture”* (Erice, 30 septembre – 6 octobre 1999), ed.: Jacqueline Hamesse, Tournhout, 427–447.
- Hankins, James 2002, “Chrysoloras and the Greek Studies of Leonardo Bruni”, *Manuele Crisolora e il ritorno del greco in occidente. Atti del Convegno Internazionale* (Napoli, 26–29 giugno 1997), eds.: Riccardo Maisano & Antonio Rollo, Napoli, 175–197.
- Hankins, James 2003, “The Ethics Controversy,” *Id.*, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance I*, Roma, 193–239.
- Krautter, Konrad 1979, “Marcus Antonius Sabellicus' Dialog *De latinae linguae reparatione*: Bemerkungen zur Struktur humanistischer Literaturgeschichtsschreibung”, *Acta conventus neo-latini amstelodamensis: Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies*, Amsterdam 19–24 August 1973, eds.: P. Tuynman, G.C. Kuiper, & E. Kessler, München, 635–646.

- Lefevre, André 1977, *Translating Literature: the German Tradition from Luther to Rosenzweig*, Assen.
- Lo Monaco, Francesco 1986, “La traduzione valliana della ‘Pro Ctesiphonte’ di Demosthene”, *Lorenzo Valla e l’umanesimo italiano*. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi umanistici, Parma, 18–19 ottobre 1984, eds.: Ottavio Besomi & Mariangela Regoliosi, Padova (*Medioevo e Umanesimo* 59), 141–164.
- Lo Monaco, Francesco 2008, “Problemi editoriali di alcune traduzioni. *Basilii Magni Homelia XIX; Demosthenis Oratio Pro Ctesiphonte; Herodoti Historiae*”, *Pubblicare il Valla*, ed.: Mariangela Regoliosi, Firenze (*Edizione Nazionale delle opere di Lorenzo Valla. Strumenti* 1), 395–402.
- Maisano, Riccardo & Antonio Rollo (eds.) 2002, *Manuele Crisolora e il ritorno del greco in occidente*. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Napoli, 26–29 giugno 1997), Napoli.
- Marassi, Massimo 2009, “Leonardo Bruni e la teoria della traduzione”, *Studi Umanistici Piceni* 29, 123–141.
- McLaughlin, Martin 1995, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance. The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo*, Oxford.
- Nida, Eugene A. 1964, *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden.
- Nida, Eugene A. & Charles R. Taber 1969, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden.
- Ottink, Marijke 2004, “Proprietas”, *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* X,2,XIV Lipsiae, col. 2085–2092.
- Pade, Marianne 2000, “La fortuna della traduzione di Tucidide di Lorenzo Valla. Con una edizione delle postille al testo”, *Niccolò V nel sesto centenario della nascita*. Atti del convegno internazionale di Sarzana, 8–10 ottobre 1998, eds.: Franco Bonatti & Antonio Manfredi, Città del Vaticano (*Studi e Testi* 397), 255–293.
- Pade, Marianne 2006, “New Words in Neo-Latin”, *La linguistique au Coeur. Valence verbale, grammaticalisation et corpus*. Mélanges offerts à Lene Schøsler à l’occasion de son 60e anniversaire, eds.: Hanne Leth Andersen, Merete Birkelund & Maj-Britt Mosegaard Hansen, Odense (*University of Southern Denmark studies in literature* 48), 249–257.
- Pade, Marianne 2007, *The Reception of Plutarch’s Lives in Fifteenth-Century Italy* I-II, Copenhagen (*Renæssancestudier* 14).
- Pade, Marianne 2008, “Niccolò Perotti and the *ars traducendi*”, *Sol et homo. Mensch und Natur in der Renaissance*. Festschrift zum 70. Geburtstag für Eckhardt Keßler, eds.: Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, Helga Pirner-Pareschi & Thomas Ricklin, München, 79–100.

- Pade, Marianne 2010, “Il Tucidide romano del Valla: la traduzione valliana nel quadro della traduzione umanistica del Quattrocento”, *Le radici umanistiche dell'europa, Lorenzo Valla, la riforma della lingua e della logica*. Atti del convegno del Comitato Nazionale VI centenario della nascita di Lorenzo Valla, Prato, 4–7 giugno 2008, ed.: Mariangela Regoliosi, Firenze, 279–298.
- Pade, Marianne (ed.) 2013, *Plutarchi Chaeronensis Vita Dionis & Comparatio et de Bruto ac Dione iudicium Guarino Veronensi interprete* (1414), Firenze (*Edizione nazionale delle traduzioni dei testi greci in età umanistica e rinascimentale*).
- Pade, Mariane 2014, “I give you back Plutarch in Latin – Guarino Veronese’s version of Plutarch’s *Dion* (1414) and early humanist translation”, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature / Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée* 41,4, 354–68.
- Pade, Marianne 2016, “Translating Thucydides: the metadiscourse of Italian humanist translators”, *The Metadiscourse of Italian Humanism*, ed.: Annet den Haan (*Renaissanceforum* 11, [www.renaissanceforum.dk](http://www.renaissanceforum.dk)), 1–22.
- Pade, Marianne 2017a, “Chrysoloras on Translation: a note on the meaning of *proprietas graeca*”, *God latin: Festschrift til Peter Zeeberg i anledning af hans 60-årsdag den 21. april 2017*. Studies in Honour of Peter Zeeberg on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday 21 April 2017, eds.: Birgitte Bøggild Johannsen, Karin Kryger & Karen Skovgaard-Petersen (*Renaissanceforum* 12, [www.renaissanceforum.dk](http://www.renaissanceforum.dk)), 53–60.
- Pade, Marianne 2017b, “Popular Government Revisited: New texts on Greek political history and their influence in fifteenth-century Italy”, *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 19, 313–338.
- Pade, Marianne forthcoming, “Neo-Latin and Vernacular Translation Theory in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: ‘The tasks of the translator’ according to Leonardo Bruni and Étienne Dolet”, *The influence on Vernacular discourse on neo-Latin literature*, eds.: Florian Schaffenrath & Alexander Winkler, Leiden & Boston (*Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts*).
- Pade, Marianne & Patricia Osmond 1999, “Classical Historians”, *Encyclopaedia of the Renaissance* vol. 3, ed.: Paul F. Grendler, New York, 154–165.
- Pozzi, Antonia 2002, *Breath: Poems and Letters*, trans.: Lawrence Venuti, Middletown, CT (*Wesleyan Poetry*).
- Ramminger, Johann 2003–, *Neulateinische Wortliste. Ein Wörterbuch des Lateinischen von Petrarca bis 1700* ([www.neulatein.de](http://www.neulatein.de)).

- Ramminger, Johann 2015–16, “Language Change in Humanist Latin: the case of *traducere* (to translate)”, *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 40–41, 35–62.
- Regoliosi, Mariangela 2001 “Mercatura optimarum artium. La traduzione secondo Lorenzo Valla”, *Les traducteurs au travail. Leurs manuscrits et leurs méthodes*. Actes du Colloque international organisé par le "Ettore Majorana Centre for Scientific Culture (Erice, 30 septembre - 6 octobre 1999), ed. J. Hamesse, Tournhout, 449-70
- Robinson, Douglas 1997, *What is Translation? Centrifugal Theories, Critical Interventions*, Kent, OH.
- Steiner, George 1975, *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*, Oxford.
- Venuti, Lawrence 1995/2008, *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London & New York.
- Venuti, Lawrence 2009, “Translation, Intertextuality, Reception”, *Romance Studies* 27,3, 157–173.
- Weiss, Roberto 1977. *Medieval and Humanist Greek: collected essays by Roberto Weiss*, *Medioevo e umanismo* 8, Padua.



# TRANSLATION AS REWRITING:



## A modern theory for a premodern practice

By Réka Forrai

*Abstract: One definition of translation in contemporary translation theory claims that rendering a text from one language into another is in fact a form of rewriting. Although this concept was first articulated in the early 1990s, this paper argues that it has much in common with premodern rhetorical ideas of imitation and emulation and can be usefully applied to explain medieval and humanist translation practices. To demonstrate this, I analyze premodern hagiographical and historiographical texts (primarily translations from Greek into Latin) in relation to Gérard Genette's concept of hypertextualité and André Lefevere's theory of translation as rewriting. Juxtaposing modern and premodern theories and practices, I identify and describe connections on both a synchronic level – between various premodern writing modes such as historiography and hagiography and translations of these genres – and a diachronic one, comparing conceptual frameworks from Late Antiquity, the medieval period, and in one instance the Renaissance, with that of contemporary translation theory.*

*I do not write, I rewrite. My memory produces my sentences. I have read so much and I have heard so much. I admit it: I repeat myself. I confirm it: I plagiarize. We are all heirs of millions of scribes who have already written down all that is essential a long time before us. We are all copyists, and all the stories we invent have already been told. There are no longer any original ideas.*

Jorge Luis Borges<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

According to modern theories of rewriting, 'translation' is the transfer of a text into a different linguistic and cultural context. Theorists of rewriting

---

<sup>1</sup> Chancel 1999, 74-75.

study this process and the ways socio-literary systems constrain it. One of the key questions this article seeks to answer is whether we can draw on the contemporary English term ‘rewriting’, as used by today’s translation scholars, to describe a range of different concepts from various periods. Can it be meaningfully related to other terms, such as Gérard Genette’s *hypertextualité*, or the Latin *rescribere* – which a medieval translator used to explain his method – or, indeed, to the term *aemulatio* found in ancient rhetoric, and particularly in Quintilian, as we will see later? By establishing connections between these terms, I do not claim that they (and the concepts underlying them) are identical, or that a genetic relationship exists between them. Instead, I focus on how we can usefully think in terms of modern theory to understand premodern translating practices more fully. Premodern texts often serve as sources only for historians and philologists who specialize in a certain period, and who rarely attempt to see such texts through the prism of contemporary translation studies. On the other hand, modern theorists of rewriting have seldom considered medieval translations.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I intend to bridge this gap by describing premodern practices with the help of Gérard Genette’s terminology and by discussing them within the context of André Lefevere’s theory of rewriting. I will first demonstrate the usefulness of my proposed approach with regard to a humanist translator, Leonardo Bruni, and then pass to a discussion of a number of medieval historiographical and hagiographical translations, focussing exclusively on those made from Greek into Latin.

### **A case in point**

Before considering the theoretical background and practical applications of my approach in detail, I would like to indicate how fruitful such a perspective can be by presenting a case study of selected works by Leonardo Bruni. He was, among other things, both a translator and a historian, and at times scholars have struggled to distinguish between these two roles. Indeed, he himself sometimes did not; his depiction of the Gothic wars, *The Italian War against the Goths* (*De bello italico adversus Gothos gesto*), for instance, is an almost verbatim translation of Books V-VIII of Procopius’ *History of the Wars* (Περὶ πολέμων). It was completed in December 1441. In a letter to

---

<sup>2</sup> André Lefevere, for example, compiled a historical anthology of treatises on translation (Lefevere 1992b) but from the roughly nine centuries that separate the lives of Jerome and Roger Bacon none seems to have been worth mentioning to the modern theorist. This, however, is the period that produced the astute reflections of a Boethius, a John Scotus Eriugena, or a Burgundio of Pisa. The same blind spot for the Middle Ages is typical for most translation theory anthologies, with the notable exception of Robinson 1997b..

Ciriaco d'Ancona, written in August of the same year, Bruni mentioned his forthcoming work and stated explicitly that it was “not a translation, but a compilation made by me” (*non translatio, sed opus a me compositum*). According to ancient, medieval, and humanist historiographical practice, a compilation (*opus compositum*) was usually based on a range of written sources.<sup>3</sup> It was still considered an author's own composition – not a case of plagiarism. Usually such works would amalgamate multiple sources and also name them. Bruni, however, had relied almost exclusively on Procopius and not acknowledged him as a source. The curial humanist Flavio Biondo noticed this. With the help of a translator (about whom nothing is known), he was able to check Procopius' original against Bruni's version. When his own work on the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, the *Decades of History from the Deterioration of the Roman Empire (Historiarum ab inclinatione Romanorum imperii decades)*, was published in 1443, Biondo shared this discovery with his readers. Bruni reacted to his revelations only once, in a letter to Francesco Barbaro, written in August 1443, where he admitted that he had only used one source, and that it was Procopius; yet he also insisted that his status as an author was not to be confused with that of a translator (*interpres*) because he had not simply translated the text, but ordered, organized, and rephrased Procopius' rudimentary prose. Also, in his opinion, that prose was as different from that of Thucydides (whom he, Bruni, had wanted to imitate), as Thersites was from Achilles.<sup>4</sup>

There are two further works by Bruni that – almost – fall into the category of rewriting. The first is his *New Cicero (Cicero novus)* of 1413, which is at the same time a translation and an expansion of the Greek life by Plutarch. In the dedicatory letter to Niccolò Niccoli, Bruni writes that he first intended merely to retranslate Plutarch's work because of the abysmal Latin of Iacopo Angeli's earlier translation. However, when he began to read the Greek original, he felt that Plutarch's account was biased against Cicero. Bruni himself describes his working method as follows:

---

<sup>3</sup> See Canfora 1971, 653-670. Cf. also Momigliano 1990, 147; Mazza 1980, 344-347; Mazza 1986, 214-216; Guenée 1980.

<sup>4</sup> “Scripsit enim hanc historiam ut te non ignorare puto Procopius Cesariensis grecus scriptor, sed admodum ineptus et eloquentie hostis ut apparet maxime in contionibus suis, quamquam Thucydidem imitari vult. Sed tantum abest ab illius maiestate quantum Thersites forma atque virtute distat ab Achille. Solum id habet boni quod bello interfuit et ob id vera refert. Ab hoc ego scriptore sumpsi non ut interpres, sed ita ut notitiam rerum ab illo susceptam meo arbitratu disponerem meisque verbis non illius referrem,” Griggio 1986, 49-50. In a letter written to Tortelli one year earlier, Bruni refers to his work in the same terms: Scripsi vero illos non ut interpres sed ut genitor, et auctor (Mehus 2, 157. See also Ianziti, 281).

Nos igitur, et Plutarcho et eius interpretatione omissis, ex iis, que uel apud nostros uel apud Grecos de Cicerone scripta legeramus, ab alio exorsi principio uitam et mores et res gestas eius maturiori digestionem et pleniori notitia non ut interpretes, sed pro nostro arbitrio uoluntateque descripsimus.

[H]aving discarded both *Angeli's* translation and Plutarch, I began afresh to give an account of *Cicero's* life and character and deeds, on the basis of what I had read about him both in Greek and Latin sources. My account has a more fitting disposition and is better informed, and I worked not as translators do, but using my own judgement and inclination.<sup>5</sup>

The second work of interest is Bruni's *The First Punic War (De primo bello Punico, 1418–1422)* in which he followed Polybius' *Histories* but supplemented his account with passages from Zonaras, Thucydides, Strabo, Florus, Eutropius, and possibly Diodorus Siculus.<sup>6</sup>

Bruni's *The Italian War, New Cicero* and *The First Punic War* are all historiographical works. At this point, it is significant to note that already at a very early stage in his career as a translator – in the dedicatory letter of his translation of Plutarch's *Antonius* (1404–1405) – Bruni had argued that the work of a translator of historiography was no less 'original' than that of a writer in this genre. He goes on to explain:

Nam si ea esset res, quae magnam ac difficilem haberet inuentionem, esset quidem longe impar translatoris causa, excogitatione ac doctrinarum facile uerborum gratiam superante. In historia uero, in qua nulla est inuentio, non uideo equidem, quid intersit, an ut facta sunt an ut ab alio dicta scribas. In utroque enim par labor est, aut etiam maior in secundo.

[If it were a translation of a work that] had required much and intricate invention, the translator's merits would not be equal, because the planning of the work and the learning involved would easily require more than just a pleasant style. But when it comes to history where there is no invention, I do not see the difference between rendering what has been done and what has been said by somebody else. The effort is the same, or perhaps even greater in the latter case.<sup>7</sup>

Bruni's use of his source materials (especially in the case of Procopius) has attracted much attention. Scholars have struggled to acquit him of the charge

---

<sup>5</sup> Pade 2007, I, 154–161.

<sup>6</sup> Reynolds 1954.

<sup>7</sup> Pade 2007, II, 155. I am grateful to Marianne Pade for her help and valuable suggestions for this section of the paper.

of plagiarism, and much effort has gone into defining these works: are they translations? Or original historiographic writings? Who is their author? <sup>8</sup> If we look at Bruni's case through the prism of the theory of rewriting, these quandaries disappear. Our attention shifts from doing justice to an 'original' text and its author/s to asking new research questions: why did one author rewrite the work of another? And how? How did readers react? How did the rewrite fit into a new context? The literary and translational theory of rewriting provides us with a language for answering these questions. Moreover, Lefevere's concept of rewriting as a theoretical framework for understanding premodern writing and translating practices enables us to set to rest once and for all the age-old, but ultimately futile, debate about fidelity versus infidelity, to revisit the discussion of originality versus plagiarism, and to address the more recent question of the re-appraisal of the roles of author versus translator.

### **Modern theories of rewriting**

In his *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982), Gérard Genette claims that every text is a hypertext connected to an earlier hypotext that it modifies through transformation or imitation. Or, in other words, the hypertext is a text created through the modification of an earlier one. He catalogues all possible hypertextual modalities (e.g., parody, sequel, and pastiche) and also includes translation among them. Most important for our purposes, however, are the modalities that he calls quantitative transformations – excision, concision, extension, and expansion – because, as we will see later, these constituted popular premodern rewriting techniques. <sup>9</sup>

Rewriting as a concept entered translation studies during the course of the so-called 'cultural turn' in the field. Its main proponent was André Lefevere, who in 1992 published the above-mentioned seminal monograph *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* and the above-mentioned collection of sources he considered key for his theories: *Translation/Culture/History: A Source Book*.<sup>10</sup> Rewriting, he claimed, is both innovation and manipulation; it is literature's way of shaping society. While Genette focuses

---

<sup>8</sup> See Ianziti 2012 and his bibliography on page 400.

<sup>9</sup> Genette 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Lefevere 1992a and 1992b. Two years earlier, Lefevere and his co-editor Susan Bassnett (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) had written what was to become a famous essay introducing the main tenets of the theory and entitled "Introduction: Proust's Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights: The 'Cultural Turn' in Translation Studies". In it, they argue that translations have to perform various cultural functions. Renderings from one language into another are defined both by the audience of the target text and the status of the source text.

on the result, the *hypertext*, Lefevere is more interested in the act of creation or transformation, i.e., the process by which one text becomes another, the *rewriting*.

Lefevere also does away with the sense of doom that is associated with the analysis of translations as hopeless attempts to measure up to the original. In his view, the process of translation is much more than a linguistic exercise; it is interconnected with literary, cultural, social, and political factors.<sup>11</sup> His theory also frees the translator from being judged in terms of fidelity or deviation from the original and enables the researcher to consider the contexts of the act of translation.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Lefevere draws our attention to people and/or institutions in positions of power (for instance, universities or publishers), by analysing how professionals rewrite texts in various ways to serve various ends, for example, the cultural and political interests of their patrons. According to him, translation is one such rewriting technique – just like editing, criticism, anthologization, historiography (which is of particular pertinence to this essay), and other types of ‘manipulative’ literary practices.

When developing his theory of translation as rewriting, Lefevere understood literature as a system and identified two groups that control it: the first comprises critics, translators, and teachers, and is concerned with poetics; the second includes patrons and various agents of power, and is mainly concerned with ideology. Lefevere calls translation “the most obvious instance of rewriting” since, he claims, it operates under all four constraints under which all writing takes place.<sup>13</sup> These, he stipulates, are ideology, poetics, the so-called universe of discourse, and language. However, rewriting, and thus translation, also operates under a fifth, that of the original.<sup>14</sup> Lefevere also

---

<sup>11</sup> “Translation is, of course, a rewriting of an original text. All rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and as such manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way. Rewriting is manipulation, undertaken in the service of power, and in its positive aspect can help in the evolution of a literature and a society. Rewritings can introduce new concepts, new genres, new devices, and the history of translation is the history also of literary innovation, of the shaping power of one culture upon another. But rewriting can also repress innovation, distort and contain, and in an age of ever increasing manipulation of all kinds, the study of the manipulative processes of literature as exemplified by translation can help us towards a greater awareness of the world in which we live,” Lefevere 1992a, vii.

<sup>12</sup> “The most important thing is not how words are matched on the page, but why they are matched that way, what social, literary, ideological considerations led translators to translate as they did, what they hoped to achieve by translating as they did, whether they can be said to have achieved their goals or not, and why,” Lefevere 1992b, 81.

<sup>13</sup> Lefevere 1985, 234.

<sup>14</sup> Lefevere 1985, 232-233. Lefevere uses the phrase ‘universe of discourse’ as a kind of umbrella term for all the discursive elements of a source text characteristic of the culture in

places translation, which he defines as just one of many types of rewriting, in a literary system, building on ideas developed by Itamar Even-Zohar in his polysystem theory, although later deviating from them, especially in his emphasis on these constraints and his innovative claim that translation is a mode of rewriting.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Lefevere asserts that translation, as a subverting or transforming influence on literature, works with other forms of rewriting; it therefore cannot be studied on its own, unless only one type of minor constraint is recognized, that of the “locutionary level of language.”<sup>16</sup> Understanding translation as one of many rewriting practices also makes it possible both to analyse it *as* rewriting and to compare it with other types of rewrites.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, Lefevere positions his theory as an alternative to those that define translation (and various paratexts) as interpretation, which suggests there exists in the text an underlying truth that only interpretation can reveal. This relationship between a text(ual truth) and its interpretation implies a hierarchical relationship between (primary and secondary) texts. If, however, as Lefevere argues, the notion of interpretation were replaced with that of rewriting, it would become possible to perceive the nature of the connection between a primary text and a secondary text differently. In particular, one could begin to see that a translation is not just a version of the original but an independent cultural product with its own agenda. Additionally, this ‘new’ relationship between the two texts could shed light on many aspects of the translation process.<sup>18</sup>

---

which it originates (e.g., religious traditions, objects, and views that are alien to the target culture) and which are therefore a challenge to the translator.

<sup>15</sup> Even-Zohar suggests that translations should be viewed as both an integral part of any literary history and a system within a larger system, that is, as a coherent unit within a socio-cultural system. In his view, translated texts are situated in a network of relations that connect them with one another and with other products of the various target language literary systems. Even-Zohar 1990.

<sup>16</sup> “Translation [...] should be studied as part of a whole system of texts and the people who produce, support, propagate, oppose, censor them. Or, to put it differently, translation can be studied in isolation only if it is reduced to one half of one of the constraints under which it is produced: that of the locutionary level of language,” Lefevere 1985, 237.

<sup>17</sup> In the past, the confusion between rewriting as an umbrella term on the one hand, and various types of rewriting (including translation) on the other, has led to some rather tangled distinctions and juxtapositions. Umberto Eco, for example, says in his *Experiences in Translation* (under the heading “Borderline Cases”): “I would tend to exclude rewriting from the ranks of translations because there is no doubt that it is an anomalous case of translation proper.” Eco 2001, 108.

<sup>18</sup> “If, on the other hand, you see translation as one, probably the most radical form of rewriting in a literature, or a culture, and if you believe that rewriting shapes the evolution of a literature or a culture at least as much as actual writing, you will analyze different instances of that process in different cultures at different times, to test your heuristic model and, no

Lefevere's theory is not without its critics. In Theo Hermans' view, while Lefevere sees constraints as "conditioning factors" that translators can resist, thus allowing that translation can be potentially subversive, he analyzes his case studies in such a way that it "rarely grants translation more than a passive role, instead of seeing it as simultaneously determined and determining".<sup>19</sup> Equally problematic is his distinction between criticism, an act of rewriting that is subject to constraints and seeks to manipulate, and scholarly study, analysis and theory, which try to explain those constraints. Although Lefevere concedes that translation contains "a bit of both", Hermans considers such a distinction hard to maintain.<sup>20</sup>

This is not the only criticism that has been levelled against Lefevere. Douglas Robinson, for instance, in *What is Translation? Centrifugal Theories, Critical Interventions*, cautions that he "tends to see translators as more or less in the service of a single system, specifically the target-language literary system", and this is because he sees things through "the lenses of systems theory".<sup>21</sup> Robinson in fact devotes his whole chapter on *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Fame* to criticising the fact that Lefevere placed his rewriting theory within the frame of systems theory, although he praises his concept of rewriting on various other accounts. His adoption of a systems theory framework, Robinson says, is problematic for several reasons, related to what he sees as flaws in systems theory in general. Such theorists claim, for instance, that people's actions are conditioned by systems, which exercise what Lefevere calls "constraints"; this implies that they are part of their own system and therefore incapable of the objectivity they claim to possess. Another weakness is that the theory describes systems, not as human constructs but as organic entities that move by themselves and constrain those who belong to them. Finally, Robinson also objects to the fact that systems theory conceives of systems as having clear, static and stable boundaries, and this raises many questions for translation, which is marked by transformations; yet despite this, Lefevere believes in the "stability of systemic boundaries".<sup>22</sup>

---

doubt, to adapt it. You can do this within the cultural subsystem called literature, and investigate to what extent rewriting is responsible for the establishment of a canon of core works and for the victories and defeats of successive constellations of poetics and ideologies, or you can decide that you don't have to stop there and that translation, like other forms of rewriting, plays an analysable part in the manipulation of words and concepts which, among other things, constitute power in a culture," Lefevere 1985, 241.

<sup>19</sup> Hermans 1999, 128-129.

<sup>20</sup> Hermans 1999, 129.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson 1997a, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Robinson 1997a, 25-42.

The points of criticism briefly revisited here are valid, especially when the theory of rewriting is applied to contemporary cases. Nevertheless, when one considers a distant historical period, one is forced to operate with temporal boundaries, however arbitrary these human constructs might be. For example, we situate our texts within Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages, even if the exact temporal limits of these constructs are often subject to debate. Identifying multiple overlapping, opposing, and parallel systems in, for instance, Byzantine and Latin medieval literary culture will present some of the same problems as those of today's world, but it will also confront the translator with others specific to its own socio-historical context.

More recently, Lefevere's theory of translation as rewriting has been taken further. Edwin Gentzler, for instance, in his recent book, *Translation and Rewriting*, says he is following on from Bassnet and Lefevere's introduction to their *Translation, History & Culture*, where they extend rewriting and translation to other written and semiotic forms such as shortened or partial versions of texts, film, music and theatre. Genette, Gentzler continues, did this for literary and cultural theory and the vocabulary he provided in *Palimpsests* is applicable to and draws examples from translation. Translation studies critical discourse, however, awaits the terms for a similar analysis.<sup>23</sup> Since translation is "not merely a footnote to history, but one of the most vital forces available to introducing new ways of thinking and inducing significant cultural change," the ways in which the text was received in both the source and target texts' cultural milieu must be analyzed.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, Gentzler suggests, one should include in a discussion of rewriting the borderline cases such as "transformation" and "recreation", even if they have been considered "marginal" to the central paradigm of "standard" translation, since "the margins may be larger than the center", while "the exceptions may outnumber the norm".<sup>25</sup> His following claim that "all translators transform texts to varying degrees", again based on Bassnet and Lefevere's theory of rewriting, creates a fertile territory for the study of literary transformations within the context of translation.

The approach I have chosen to adopt in this paper resembles that presented by Gentzler, insofar as I am relying on both Genette's concepts of rewriting as discussed in *Palimpsests* and Lefevere's as applied to translating. While Genette describes *how* people rewrite, Lefevere tries to explain *why* they do it. As I am going to show, the premodern texts I analyse often discuss the *how*

---

<sup>23</sup> Gentzler 2016, 12-13.

<sup>24</sup> Gentzler 2016, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Gentzler 2016, 7.

in terms that are very similar to those used by Genette.<sup>26</sup> Their authors, however, do not reflect on the context of their rewritings. Lefevere's ideas can help historians in this regard: using his notion of constraints, in particular, makes it possible to account for those rewriting techniques that are determined by the multi-layered contexts of translation. These elements include, but are not limited to, the ideological background of the translator, the exigences of the patron, and the expectations of the audience. These, of course, were discussed by translation theorists and historians before Lefevere elaborated his rewriting theory. However, the application of his terminology of constraints brings them sharply into focus and highlights their importance in the translation process.

The theory of rewriting as presented above offers a useful tool for understanding medieval translation practices, not least because it is 'optimistic'. It enables us to judge medieval translations by criteria other than those pertaining to purely linguistic or narrowly literary matters, which in older studies invariably resulted in giving medieval translation a bad press. Texts translated from Greek into Latin were generally of a so-called pragmatic nature, that is, non-literary; the translators' approach was thus more technical. In making them accessible, translators were usually driven by non-literary motivations, for example, religious interests, political incentives, ecclesiastic necessities, and requests by patrons. This is why most modern translation theories elaborated in the early decades of the discipline of translation studies, and especially before the time of the 'cultural turn,' were ill-suited to describe premodern translations. They were normative and focused almost exclusively on linguistic and textual issues or questions such as the impossibility of translation; or they offered detailed comparisons of linguistic equivalences and differences. It almost goes without saying that such approaches are particularly unhelpful when it comes to historical investigations in which context plays a central role.<sup>27</sup>

Another benefit of thinking in terms of rewriting is that it makes it possible to draw connections between translation and other modes of writing. As I said above, in quoting Lefevere, translation should not be studied in isolation. Scholars such as Rita Copeland, Gianfranco Folena, Frederick Renner and Eric

---

<sup>26</sup> See the table on page 37.

<sup>27</sup> Criticism of translations on linguistic and literary grounds can of course also be found in premodern evaluations of translators' works, which would require a study in its own right. There, the *verbum e verbo* versus *sensum de sensu* practice of translating constituted the major theoretical concern. It should not, however, be considered a straight equivalent of the modern literal versus free translation dichotomy. Moreover, for the modern scholar this question belongs to the historical context of the translation, and thus ceases to be of a purely linguistic or literary nature.

Jacobsen have examined translation in relation, for example, to grammar, rhetoric, teaching, and exegesis.<sup>28</sup> I will demonstrate that it is also important to study it alongside unilingual compositions of the same genre. Rewriting as a practice of textual transformation is in fact not only characteristic of premodern translation but also of narrative genres such as historiography and hagiography: a medieval author/compiler of historiography and a Byzantine hagiographer, as well as a translator of any of these types of texts, would all use the same methods of rewriting. The theory of rewriting can be suitably applied to these narrative genres and their translations, since they were characterized by a certain fluidity, being circulated in numerous versions and with many manuscript variants. Moreover, rewriting, as Lefevere says, has always played an important role in literary development, starting with

the Greek slave who put together anthologies of the Greek classics to teach the children of his Roman masters, to the Renaissance scholar who collated various manuscripts and scraps of manuscripts to publish a more or less reliable edition of a Greek or Roman classic.<sup>29</sup>

The authors and translators discussed in this essay are part of that long tradition of rewriting that, according to Lefevere, continues to this day. This is why modern theories such as his and Genette's can be fruitfully applied to their work, as well as to the classical and medieval rhetorical theories and methodologies of imitation and emulation that informed their compositions.

### **Rewriting in premodern texts**

In Book X of his *Institutes of Oratory* (*Institutio Oratoria*), Quintilian discusses writing as a combination of imitation and invention, and translation as part of the orator's training in writing. While in his view it is impossible to imitate other authors completely, practicing imitation can help hone one's own writing skills. Similarly, the translation of Greek texts into Latin is, Quintilian writes, one method by which orators can improve their speeches. In Chapter V of Book X we also read that in order to acquire copiousness and facility (*copia ac facilitas*) in writing one should translate from Greek – just as Cicero himself did. While translation is here first and foremost conceived

---

<sup>28</sup> “A theoretical history of translation in the Western Middle Ages cannot be written as if translation represents a semi-autonomous development of stylistics,” Copeland 1991, 1. “Per noi non si dà teoria senza esperienza storica. Né si può parlare di ‘teoria della traduzione’ se non come parte di teorie generali della letteratura, della linguistica o dell’ermeneutica filosofica,” (For us, there is no theory without historical experience. One cannot talk about translation theory unless as part of general theories of literature, linguistics and philosophical hermeneutics), Folena 1991, ix. See also Renner 1989 and Jacobsen 1958, 2004.

<sup>29</sup> Lefevere 1992a, 2.

as a practice drill, the result can eventually be made public and appreciated as a literary work.<sup>30</sup> Next to translating from Greek into Latin (*vertere Graeca in Latinum*), Quintilian also recommends paraphrasing from Latin into Latin (*ex Latinis conversio*) as another good method to better one's own writing skills. He adds that paraphrase is not just interpretation (*interpretatio*) but also emulation (*aemulatio*).<sup>31</sup> Interlingual and intralingual 'rewritings' are thus presented as closely connected activities. Quintilian's advice was put into practice: rhetorical school exercises called Προγυμνάσματα in Greek and *praeexercitamina* in Latin, for instance, included rewriting as a core task.<sup>32</sup> They required a student to take a model text and rewrite it according to various guidelines.

Another author whose thoughts on rewriting may have inspired later theories, including those from the medieval period, is the fifth-century writer, Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius. Referring to Virgil's *Aeneid* as a rewrite of Homer in books IV to VI of his *Seven Books of Saturnalia* (*Saturnaliorum Libri Septem*), a collection of discussions on a wide range of subjects from history to mythology and grammar, Macrobius describes two stages of imitation: *mutuatio* and *mutatio*, borrowing and modification. The first text (the original) is written by an *auctor*, the second text by an *imitator*; however, the imitator can also become an author in his own right when he in turn is imitated by someone else – and so on. Even Macrobius' own text is a rewriting: a compilation of various authors that contains both their words and his own. By proceeding in this way, Macrobius follows, he explains, the example of bees:

Apes enim quodam modo debemus imitari, quae vagantur et flores carpunt, deinde quicquid attulere disponunt ac per favos dividunt, et sucum varium in unum saporem mixtura quadam et proprietate spiritus sui mutant.

---

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Jerome's testimony to this practice: "There was an old custom among scholars, that they would reduce Greek books into Latin speech for the purpose of exercising their wits, and, what is even more difficult, would translate poems by illustrious men, also showing necessary respect for the meter. For the same reason, our Cicero translated complete books by Plato word-for-word and, after he had brought forth his Roman Aratus in hexameter verses, amused himself with Xenophon's *Economics*" ("Vetus iste disertorum mos fuit, ut exercendi ingenii causa Graecos libros Latino sermone absolvent, et, quod plus in se difficultatis habet, poemata illustrium virorum, addita metri necessitate, transferrent. unde et noster Tullius Platonis integros libros ad verbum interpretatus est: et cum Aratum jam Romanum hexametris versibus edidisset, in Xenophontis *Oeconomico* lusit", Helm 1984, 6).

<sup>31</sup> Butler 1920-1922, X, 5.

<sup>32</sup> For further information on the terms *praeexercitamen*, *praeexercitamentum*, *praeexercitatio* see *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, vol. 10, pt. 2, 598-599.

We ought to imitate bees, if I can put it that way: wandering about, sampling the flowers, they arrange whatever they've gathered, distributing it among the honeycomb's cells, and by blending in the peculiar quality of their own spirit they transform the diverse kinds of nectar into a single taste.<sup>33</sup>

According to Classical rhetoric, the main strategies to use in compositions based on other writings are amplification, addition, concentration or deletion, substitution, and transposition.<sup>34</sup> These were carried over into the medieval *artes poeticae*, twelfth- and thirteenth-century medieval treatises on literary theory that focused mainly on poetry. In her recent study of medieval hagiographical texts, Monique Goulet studied these rhetorical practices, which she gathers under the term *réécriture*, using Gérard Genette's *Palimpsests* as a basis for her comparative analysis. She came to the conclusion that very strong similarities could be found between them.<sup>35</sup> The following table illustrates some of the shared features.

Genette <i>Palimpsests</i>	Twelfth- and thirteenth-century medieval <i>artes poeticae</i>
Quantitative transformation	
• abbreviation (excision, concision, condensation)	• <i>abbreviatio</i>
• amplification (extension, expansion, amplification)	• <i>amplificatio</i>
Formal transformations	
• translation	• <i>translatio</i>
• prosification or versification	• <i>alteratio</i>
• transstylisation	
• transmodalisation	
Semantic or conceptual transformation	

Both Genette and the twelfth- and thirteenth-century medieval theorists whom Goulet discusses (Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Eberhard the German, and John of Garland) identify translation as a form of rewriting. As we will see, many premodern translators also promoted this concept in their prefaces.

---

<sup>33</sup> Kaster 2011, *Prologue*, I, 5. On Macrobius and rewriting see also Kelly 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Butler 1920-1922, I, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Goulet 2005.

Moreover, when translating, they often used techniques of transformation typical of those involved in rewriting as described by Genette, and in particular those he calls quantitative, i.e., which affect the length of the text. Since these translators do not always explicitly call their works rewritings, it is difficult to discuss the Latin terminology used for the practice. Indeed, I found few cases explicit references, such as the words *rescribere* (to write again, to rewrite), in the form *rescribendi* used by John the Monk;<sup>36</sup> *conscribere* (to compose, to write down, to compile), appearing as *conscripsit* in John the Monk and *conscripsimus* in Rufinus of Aquileia;<sup>37</sup> *retexo* (to change, to revise, to correct) in the form *retextu* in Gregorius.<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, references to techniques of rewriting are many, and it is mostly thanks to them that we can identify the process: Rufinus' *omissis que videbantur superflua* (I omitted what seemed superfluous); John the Monk's *emendate conscribit* (he wrote down the corrections); Guarimopotus' *quod deest adhibemus* (we add what is missing);<sup>39</sup> Hugh of Fleury's *deflorare* and *extrahere* (to excerpt and to extract);<sup>40</sup> and an anonymous author's *extrasi* (I extracted).<sup>41</sup> On a terminological level, we can notice echoes of these premodern concepts in Genette. On a conceptual level, the premodern translations to be discussed here foreshadow Lefevere's view about the relationship between original and translation. The former is seen, not as a text inspiring reverence and authority compared with which the translation can only be considered inferior, but as a point of departure for creating something new.

Let us first consider some examples from premodern historiography. Both Rufinus of Aquileia and Cassiodorus noted that their methodology for reorganizing materials included, for instance, omission and insertion. In the preface to his translation of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Ecclesiastical History* (*Historia ecclesiastica*) Rufinus remarks:

omissis quae videbantur superflua, historiae si quid habuit, nono coniunximus libro et in ipso Eusebii narrationi dedimus finem. Decimum vero vel undecimum librum nos conscripsimus partim ex maiorum traditionibus, partim ex his, quae nostra iam memoria comprehenderat et eos velut duos pisciculos supra scriptis panibus addidimus.

---

<sup>36</sup> Huber 1913, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Simonetti 1961, 267.

<sup>38</sup> Viricillo Franklin 2004, 307.

<sup>39</sup> Devos 154.

<sup>40</sup> Lake 2013, 180.

<sup>41</sup> Lake 2013, 285.

I omitted what seemed superfluous and joined whatever historical information it contained to the ninth book, and there I brought to an end the narrative of Eusebius. I myself wrote the tenth and eleventh books, based partly upon the accounts of my predecessors and partly upon what my own memory had retained, and I joined them like the two fish to the loaves of the writings that precede them.<sup>42</sup>

Rufinus' methods were based on quantitative transformations: cutting and adding. Cassiodorus used the same approach when he and Epiphanius Scholasticus compiled their *Tripartite History* (*Historia ecclesiastica Tripartita*): they excerpted passages from the Greek historians Socrates Scholasticus, Salminius Hermias Sozomenus and Theodoret of Cyrus, and then completed this composition with information taken from elsewhere.<sup>43</sup> Jerome confessed to having used a similar methodology in his translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (Παντοδαπή ιστορία), combining within himself the roles of two types of scholar: the historian and the translator.

Sciendum etenim est, me et interpretis et scriptoris ex parte officio usum, quia et Graeca fidelissime expressi, et nonnulla quae mihi intermissa videbantur adieci.

I fulfilled the task of both the translator, and to some extent, of an author, since I faithfully translated the Greek and added a considerable amount of material that I thought had been omitted.<sup>44</sup>

Rufinus, Cassiodorus and Jerome all used the same rewriting techniques that were described in contemporary rhetorical theory, i.e., abbreviation and expansion. They all combined translated materials with texts written by themselves. In doing so, they did not primarily pay attention to the original they were translating, but instead focused on an extratextual entity, for example, historical truth or chronological completeness.

This approach also characterizes the methodologies used by medieval historians, including the ninth-century papal librarian Anastasius Bibliothecarius, who translated a Byzantine historiographical corpus of texts entitled the *Chronographia Tripartita*. This, at least, is the title Anastasius gave his collection of historical writings by three Byzantine authors: the

---

<sup>42</sup> Simonetti 1961, 267, and Lake 2013, 76.

<sup>43</sup> “[...] quos nos per Epiphanium Scholasticum Latino condentes eloquio, necessarium duximus eorum dicta deflorata in unius styli tractum [...] perducere [...] Nos autem [...] cognovimus non aequaliter omnes de unaquaque re luculenter ac subtiliter explanasse; sed modo hunc, modo alterum aliam partem melius expediisse. Et ideo judicavimus de singulis doctoribus deflorata colligere, et cum auctoris sui nomine in ordinem collocare,” Jacob and Hanslik, 1952, 1-2.

<sup>44</sup> Helm 1984, 6 and Lake 2013, 68.

*Chronographeion syntomon* by Nicephorus I, Patriarch of Constantinople, the *Extract of Chronography* by George Synkellos, and its continuation, Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronicle*. Anastasius' work, a selective translation that uses the above-described compositional techniques, thus occupies a central place in a chain of rewritings. It was intended for a colleague of the translator, John the Deacon, another papal official at the late ninth-century pontifical court, who was going to incorporate it into his great ecclesiastical history. However, as John never finished it, the translation was presented as a rewrite when it began to be circulated under Anastasius' name, which replaced those of the original Byzantine authors.<sup>45</sup> The rationale behind Anastasius' rewriting techniques can be discerned if we consider certain factors that in Lefevre's theory of rewriting are called constraints. One in this case is crucial: the role of the patron – the papal official historiographer, and, implicitly, the institution of the papacy itself. Anastasius' translation has to comply with his expectations and produce a text well suited to be incorporated into an official papal ecclesiastical history.

The same rewriting strategies can be observed in many medieval historiographical works, even if they do not involve translation as a compositional step.<sup>46</sup> In the tenth century, for instance, Richer, a monk of Saint Rémi outside Rheims, in the prologue of his *Histories (Historiae)*, which was a continuation of the *Annals of Saint-Bertin (Annales Bertiniani)*, pre-empt potential accusations of plagiarism by saying that even though he has borrowed passages from another book, he has rewritten them in a different style:

Sed si ignotae antiquitatis ignorantiae arguar, ex quodam Flodoardi presbyteri Remensis libello me aliqua sumpsisse non abnuo, at non verba quidem eadem, sed alia pro aliis longe diverso orationis scemate disposuisse, res ipsa evidentissime demonstrat.

Now if I am accused of being ignorant of the unknown past, I do not deny that I took some things from a certain book of Flodoard, a priest of Rheims, but the content itself shows very clearly that I did not use

---

<sup>45</sup> Nowadays, for cases such as this, the term 'rewriting' – instead of the more problematic term 'translation' – is more often used. See, for instance, a recent publication that treats the Anglo-Saxon translation of Orosius as a rewrite: Godden 2016.

<sup>46</sup> Some adaptations of Saxo Grammaticus' *History of the Danes (Gesta Danorum)* provide us with an interesting example. As shown by Gustav Albeck, two very different rewritings of Saxo's work, a vernacular epic poem from the mid-thirteenth century, *The History of the Kings of Denmark (Knytlinga saga)*, and a fourteenth-century Latin abridged version (*Compendium Saxonis*), use the same principles for abbreviating the original and thus end up excerpting almost exactly the same passages from Saxo. Albeck 1946.

the same words, but different ones, and that I employed a very different rhetorical style.<sup>47</sup>

Likewise, in the eleventh century, Adam of Bremen, when listing the sources for his *Deeds of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen (Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum)*, uses a metaphor to describe his approach that is similar to that which Macrobius employed:

[...] fateor tibi, quibus ex pratis defloravi hoc sertum, ne dicar specie veri captasse mendacium: itaque de his quae scribo, aliqua per scedulas dispersa collegi, multa vero mutuavi de hystoriis et privilegiis Romanorum [...].

I will reveal to you the meadows from which I have plucked the flowers of this garland, lest it be said that I have seized upon a lie with the appearance of the truth. Some of what I am writing I gathered from scattered pages, but I borrowed a great deal from histories and papal documents [...].<sup>48</sup>

Similarly, Hugh of Fleury, in the prologue to his *Ecclesiastical History (Historia Ecclesiastica)*, explains that his working method is built on the principles of abbreviation and condensation:<sup>49</sup>

Aecclesiasticam enim relegens historiam a multis historiologis per partes editam et modis uariis comprehensam, quam in hoc uno uolumine decreui coartare, et coadunatis mihi quam pluribus libris uobis deflorare, ueritatisque medullam de singulis diligenter extrahere, utens eorundem auctorum uerbis in quibusdam locis, aliquando uero sermonibus meis.

After reading over the history of the Church produced piecemeal by many historians and recounted in different styles, I decided to condense it into this one volume, and after collecting as many books as possible, to excerpt from them for you and carefully extract the kernel of truth from each one, in certain cases using the same words as the authors and sometimes using my own.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Hoffman 2000, 36 and Lake 2013, 147.

<sup>48</sup> Schmeidler 1917, 4 and Lake 2013, 169.

<sup>49</sup> As does Otto of Freising in his *Chronicle, or History of the two cities (Chronica de duabus ciuitatibus)*: “et ea, quae ipsi copiose profuseque dixerunt, compendio stringere” (I abbreviated what they wrote about extensively and in detail). Hofmeister 1912, 9 and Lake 2013, 226.

<sup>50</sup> Lake 2013, 180. Latin original Waitz 1851, 349.

It is apparent from these prologues that the rewriting strategies of adding and cutting, as well as reorganizing the material, are often found in historiographical works, whether translated or not. Using Lefevere's terminology we can say, then, that strong poetic constraints also define these rewritings.

From the passage quoted above, it is also apparent that Hugh is not interested in the wording of the original sources, but in their 'kernel of truth'. The same concern can be observed in the prologue of the fourteenth-century *Eulogy of Histories* (*Eulogium historiarum sive temporis*). Its author, an anonymous English monk, seeks the "marrow" of previous historiographical works.

Sed licet aliena assumo mea tamen reputo quae in sententiis eorum profero, ita ut quos in hoc proemio scripsero contra garrulantes istis utar pro clypeo [...] Istam igitur compilationem ex sanctorum patrum chronographorum studiis mutuatam aliquo nomine autentico nolo decorare, sed quia ex laboribus antiquorum aliqua paucula medullata extraxi, hoc libellum conglobatum Eulogium volo nominari.

Although I am using the work of others, I nonetheless believe that whatever I set down here in their words belongs to me, such that as a shield against my critics I am using the authors whose names are written in the introduction. [...] Therefore, I do not want to furnish this compilation, which is derived from the labours of the holy fathers who wrote history, with an original title, but because I extracted some little bit of the marrow from the labours of the ancients, I want the hodgepodge that is this book to be called the *Eulogy*.<sup>51</sup>

The quest for historical truth as a guiding principle for composing these texts can again be described in terms of Lefevere's rewriting theory, by referring to the constraint of ideology. The ideological character of this 'truth' is apparent in many cases. By rewriting Eusebius, Jerome managed to include more Roman material in a text too much focused on Greek history. By rewriting another work by the same Eusebius, Rufinus was aiming at blending his own ideas about Church and empire with those of the writer of the original.<sup>52</sup> Anastasius' aim, as we have said, was to select from the Byzantine historians' works those materials suited for the purposes of an official papal history of the church. The twin strategies of adding and cutting enabled the translators to shape the text into the right ideological mould by taking away what does not serve the new purpose and adding elements that the new context demands.

---

<sup>51</sup> Haydon 1858-1863, I, 2, 4 and Lake 2013, 285.

<sup>52</sup> Humphries 2008.

As indicated earlier, hagiography is another literary genre in which re-writing techniques are applied. This becomes apparent, for instance, from the comments made by Guarimpotus, the ninth-century Neapolitan translator of hagiographical works. In his preface to the *Passion of Saint Eustrathius* (*Passio Sancti Eustrathii*, BHL 2778), he describes his working methods as follows: adding some things, leaving out others, changing and replacing parts of the text, and moving other parts of it around; in short, he does what well-known authors are known to do.<sup>53</sup> For Guarimpotus the differences between translator and author are opaque, not least since – although he says he is translating (*transtulisse*) – he considers other writers (*auctores*) his models. His other term for what he is doing is *transfundere*, perhaps a more precise description of what he does, namely ‘pouring’ a story once told in Greek into Latin. In another of his projects, the *Passion of Saint Blasius* (*Passio Sancti Blasii*, BHL 1380-1379), he took an earlier translation, the quality of which he found unsatisfactory, and tried to improve it by applying the same techniques he used in his interlingual works as in his intralingual ones. The absurd previous version he improved by cutting, adding, reordering, and removing obscurities, so that the text would no longer appear ridiculous to those who read or heard it.<sup>54</sup>

A reverse example of hagiographic rewriting is the tenth-century Latin translation of John Moschos’ *The Spiritual Meadow* (Λειμὼν, *Pratum spirituale*) by John the Monk of Amalfi. Not only did the translator keep his interventions to a minimum, he actually apologized for this approach in the prologue, where he acknowledged that the proper way of composing (a letter) is first to draft it (*exemplat*), then correct it (*emendat*), and then rewrite it, i.e., compose the corrected version (*emendata conscribit*). However, he left the task of rewriting (*rescribendi*) to his readers. He evoked Jerome’s working methods as an example: Jerome would first dictate a draft to his scribes, then correct it, and finally hand over the revised draft to the scribes who would

---

<sup>53</sup> “[...] haec me transtulisse confiteor, plurimis additis, plurimis ademptis, mutatis et transmutatis dictionibus aliisque pro aliis positis, uti omnes maiores auctores nostros fecisse dinoscimus,” Devos, 1958, 154-155. The translator of the *Passion of Saint Febronia* (*Passio Febroniae*, BHL 2843) uses almost the same words: “quibusdam additis, quibusdam ademptis, mutatis transmutatisque dictionibus, aliisque pro aliis positis,” Chiesa 1990, 298. This could indicate that the two works were produced by the same translator, but perhaps also that the techniques mentioned and the terms used to describe them were in widespread use among translators.

<sup>54</sup> “Namque haec sancti martyris et praesulis eximii Blasii et sociorum eius adeo absurdissima extitit Passio, ut non solum non intellexeretur, verum etiam ridiculum legentibus et audientibus eius incompta denotaret obscuritas [...], inordinata componimus, superflua resecamus, quod deest adhibemus, quodque obscurum est ad liquidum ducere curamus,” Devos 1958, 158.

make a fair copy. Since he did not have access to a capable editor, he had to hand the task of polishing the text, or rather the narrative, over to his learned and pious readers.<sup>55</sup> The fact that John the Monk thought he must excuse himself for this shows that the opposite practice must have been the more widespread, and that translators were also expected to do a kind of editing work on the final product.

It was often the case that either the translator improved on a pre-existing version, or a team among whose members the tasks were divided executed the translation proper and the rewriting. The ninth-century Roman translator Gregorius chose the latter practice for his translation of the *Passion of Anastasius the Persian* (*Passio Sancti Anastasii* BHL 411a). He stated that the existing translation was so bad that it was necessary to produce a new one, and took the task upon himself. However, a colleague, Nicholas, assisted in this endeavour; he prepared a draft that Gregorius rewrote. Gregorius claimed that during the rewriting process he not only improved on the rough Latin version, he also corrected passages from the Greek original that he considered unsatisfactory.<sup>56</sup> Translators of hagiographical texts, such as Nicholas and Gregorius, seem to have felt a particular sense of obligation, not so much towards the wording of the original text – no effort seems to have been made to conserve it – but towards an ever-improving version of the story it told and also towards their readers (often patrons), who wished for a translation that

---

<sup>55</sup> “Hoc enim notum sit omnibus in quorum manibus uentura sunt hec opuscula seu narrationes, quia prima exemplaria sunt translata a greco in latinum. Et, ut scitis omnes, quia qui epistolam uult scribere alicui, primum exemplat, postea emendat et iam emendata conscribit. Michi autem non fuit ista possibilitas, quia, ut iam dixi, in ultima senectute constitutus et oculi caligant michi et renes dolent, non potui plus facere. Etenim si possibilitas rescribendi esset, et uerba consonantia inuenirem et stilum aliquem dulcem in componendo haberem. Sed hoc uobis relinquo, qui sanctiores et sapientiores estis: huius opusculi materiam et fidelem translationem uos componite, ut decet. Nam bene linquimus, quia patrem Iheronimum sic fecisse legimus: Primo quidem per scriptores notariis (notarios?) scribebat, deinde per se ipsum dictata corrigebat et emendabat et sic ad scribendum librariis tradebat. Michi autem hec omnia faciendi possibilitas non fuit, quia in loco in quo habito non solum modo notarius aut scriptor non inuenitur, uerum etiam qui latinum uerbum sciat non inuenitur. Unde precor uos omnes qui lecturi estis: quod corrigendum est corrigite, quod emendandum emendate et michi, queso, ueniam date,” Huber 1913, 1-2.

<sup>56</sup> “Vestrae benignitatis excellentia nos ammodum rogavit, ut beati Anastasii martyrium quod quidam grammaticae artis expertissimus de graeco in latinum confuse transtulerat, urbanus regulari digestu componerem. Nycolaum igitur praelustrem archipresbyterum, achivos quidem luculente, latinos uero ex parte apices eruditum, obnixè postulauimus, quatenus praedictum martyrium de graeco in latinum observata serie transferret ut et nos deinceps retextu promptiore illud prosequeremur. [...] Sed quia idem apud Graecos etiam ipsos in plerisque locis insulse compositum adesse prospeximus, multa quidem superflua, salvo manente sensu, penitus subtraximus,” Vircillo Franklin 2004, 307-308. For an analysis of the prologue see pages 104-115.

did justice to the holy protagonists of the text.<sup>57</sup> In terms of Lefevere's theory, this complaint about badly carried out earlier versions and their rewritings tells us about the limitations and constraints imposed on translations. One can be language, but also, that of audience and context. These texts were composed for church-goers, to be performed orally, in a liturgical context; translators were thus aiming at a smooth and clear narrative.

### Conclusion

My starting point in this essay was a discussion of Bruni's working methods and conception of translation and rewriting, based on both the historical precedents of his methodology and a modern theoretical framework that helps explain them. As we have seen, writing in premodern times often involved reworking an existing textual base, whether in an interlingual or intralingual context. These medieval translators and/or compilers evidently thought it their responsibility to modify and improve, if necessary, on the original text. From their prologues we see that rewriting was a conscious act; translators were aware of what they did, and did not necessarily hide their rewriting in order to deceive their readers. Furthermore, as my analysis of some historiographical and hagiographical works has shown, rewriting techniques were used, not only in translations but also in other kinds of textual compositions, and, judging by the translators' and authors' paratextual comments, were considered acceptable by contemporary readers, even sometimes being requested by the patrons themselves.

A range of rewriting strategies, or to use Genette's term, modalities, is strongly present in the medieval translations and other types of literary composition that I have discussed, and I can say that from this point of view Bruni follows in the footsteps of his predecessors. Most prominent are those that Genette called quantitative, that is, techniques of shortening or lengthening the original text, but others, as we have seen, were embraced by the various translators. This suggests that the notion of improvement was not incompatible with the task of translating these types of composition, since the translators were primarily concerned with detaching the text from its original environment and fitting it into a new context. And this is where Lefevere's definition of translation as rewriting becomes relevant and helpful. The

---

<sup>57</sup> Further instances of rewriting can be found, for example, in the prologues of Petrus Subdiaconus. See D'Angelo 2002, who in his introductory section discusses translation and rewriting (*Traduzione e riscritture*, pp. CXVIII-CLIII). Also, there was a similar approach in the Byzantine hagiographical tradition. The subtitle of Christian Høgel's monograph on the hagiographer Symeon Metaphrastes reads *Rewriting and Canonization*: Høgel argues that Symeon reworked and rewrote the original stories with the aim that his version of certain lives of the saints would finally become canonical.

constraints of this new context and the expectations and limitations imposed on the translator – those of patronage, poetics and ideology, as well as those of a cultural and linguistic nature – are in correlation with the rewriting strategies used.

### Bibliography

- Albeck, Gustav 1946, “Knytlinga: Sagaerne om Danmarks Konger. Studier i ældre nordisk Litteratur”, *Historisk Tidsskrift* 11.2, 274-293.
- BHL *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et mediae aetatis*, 1898-190. Subsidia Hagiographica 6. Bruxelles.
- Butler, Harold E. (ed. & trans.) 1920-1922, *The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian, with an English Translation*, Cambridge, MA.
- Canfora, Luciano 1971, “Il ciclo storico”, *Belfagor* 26, 653-670.
- Chancel, Jacques 1999, *Jorge Luis Borges: Radioscopie*, Paris.
- Chiesa, Paolo 1990, *Le versioni latine della Passio Sanctae Febroniae: Storia, metodo, modelli di due traduzioni agiografiche altomedievali*, Spoleto (*Biblioteca di Medioevo latino* 2).
- Copeland, Rita 1991, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts*, Cambridge (*Cambridge studies in medieval literature* 11).
- D'Angelo, Edoardo 2002, *Pietro Suddiacono napoletano. L'opera agiografica*, Florence.
- Devos, Paul, 1958, “L'œuvre de Guarimpotus, hagiographe napolitain”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 76,1-2, 151-187.
- Eco, Umberto 2001, *Experiences in Translation*, trans. Alastair McEwen, Toronto.
- Even-Zohar, Itamar 1990, “The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem”, *Poetics Today* 11,1, 45-51.
- Folena, Gianfranco 1991, *Volgarizzare e tradurre*, Turin.
- Genette, Gérard 1997, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans.: Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln NE.
- Gentzler, Edwin 2016, *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies*, London.
- Godden, Malcolm R. 2016, *The Old English History of the World: An Anglo-Saxon Rewriting of Orosius*, Cambridge, MA.
- Gouillet, Monique 2005, *Écriture et réécriture hagiographiques: Essai sur les réécritures de Vies de saints dans l'Occident latin médiéval (VIIIe-XIIIe s.)*, Turnhout.
- Griggio, Claudio 1986, “Due lettere inedite del Bruni al Salutati e a Francesco Barbaro,” *Rinascimento* n.s. 26, 27-50.
- Guenée, Bernard 1980, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval*, Paris.
- Haydon, Frank Scott (ed.) 1858-1863, *Eulogium (Historiarum sive Temporis): Chronicon ab orbe condito usque ad annum Domini 1366*, London.
- Helm, Rudolf (ed.) 1956, *Die Chronik des Hieronymus/Hieronymi Chronicon*, Berlin.

- Hermans, Theo 1999, *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained*, London.
- Hoffmann, Hartmut (ed.) 2000, *Richer von Saint-Remi Historiae*, MGH: *Scriptores* 38, Hanover.
- Hofmeister, Adolf (ed.) 1912, *Ottonis episcopi Frisingensis chronica sive historia de duabus civitatibus*, Hanover & Leipzig.
- Huber, Michael (ed.) 1913, *Johannes Monachus. Liber de miraculis: Ein neuer Beitrag zur mittelalterlichen Mönchsliteratur*, Heidelberg.
- Humphries, Mark (2008), "Rufinus's Eusebius: Translation, Continuation, and Edition in the Latin Ecclesiastical History", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16.2, 143-164.
- Høgel, Christian 2002, *Symeon Metaphrastes: Rewriting and Canonization*, Copenhagen.
- Ianziti, Gary 2012, *Writing History in Renaissance Italy: Leonardo Bruni and the Uses of the Past*, Cambridge (MA).
- Jacob, Walter & Rudolf Hanslik (eds.) 1952, *Cassiodori–Epiphaniï Historia ecclesiastica tripartita [...]*, Vienna.
- Jacobsen, Eric 1958, *Translation A Traditional Craft: An Introductory Sketch with a Study of Marlowe's Elegies*, Copenhagen.
- Kaster, Robert M. (ed. and trans.) 2011, *Macrobius: Saturnalia*, 3 vols., Cambridge, MA.
- Kelly, Douglas 1999, *The Conspiracy of Allusion: Description, Rewriting, and Authorship from Macrobius to Medieval Romance*, Leiden (*Studies in the History of Christian Tradition* 97).
- Lake, Justin (ed.) 2013, *Prologues to Ancient and Medieval History: A Reader*, Toronto (*Readings in Medieval Civilization and Cultures* XVII).
- Lefevre, André 1985, "Why Waste our Time on Rewrites? The Trouble with Interpretation and the Role of Rewriting in an Alternative Paradigm", *The Manipulation of Literature: Studies in Literary Translation*, ed.: Theo Hermans, London, 215-243.
- Lefevre, André 1992a, *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, London & New York.
- Lefevre, André (ed.), 1992b, *Translation/ History/ Culture: A Sourcebook*, London and New York.
- Lefevre, André and Susan Bassnet, 1990, "Introduction: Proust's Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights. The 'Cultural Turn' in Translation Studies", *Translation History and Culture*, eds.: André Lefevre & Susan Bassnet, London, 1-13.
- Mazza, Mario 1980, "Sulla teoria della storiografia cristiana: osservazioni sui proemi degli storici ecclesiastici", *La storiografia ecclesiastica nella tarda*

- antichità*, Atti del convegno tenuto in Erice (3–8 XII 1978), ed.: S. Calderone, Messina, 335–389.
- Mazza, Mario 1986, “La *Historia Tripartita* di Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro Senatore: metodi e scopo”, *Atti della Settimana di studi su Flavio Magno Aurelio Cassiodoro (Cosenza-Squillace, 19–24 settembre 1983)*, ed.: Sandro Leanza, Messina, 210–244.
- Mehus, Lorenzo 1741, *Leonardi Bruni Arretini epistolarum libri VIII*, 2 vols., Florence.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo 1990, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, Berkeley.
- Pade, Marianne 2007, *The Reception of Plutarch’s Lives in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 2 vols. Copenhagen (*Renæssancestudier* 14).
- Rener, Frederick M. 1989, *Interpretatio. Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler*, Amsterdam.
- Reynolds, Beatrice 1954, “Bruni and Perotti Present a Greek Historian”, *Bibliothèque d’humanisme et Renaissance* 16,1 108-118.
- Robinson, Douglas 1997a, *What is Translation? Centrifugal Theories, Critical Interventions*, Kent, OH & London.
- Robinson, Douglas, 1997b, *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, Manchester.
- Schmeidler, Bernhard (ed.) 1917, *Magistri Adam Bremensis Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, Hanover.
- Simonetti, Manlio 1961, *Tyrannii Rufini Opera*, Turnhout (*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* XX).
- Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* 1900-, X,2,IV, Leipzig.
- Vircillo Franklin, Carmela 2004, *The Latin Dossier of Anastasius the Persian: Hagiographic Translations and Transformations*, Toronto.
- Waitz, Georg (ed.) 1851, *Hugonis Floriacensis opera historica. Accedunt aliae Francorum historiae, Scriptores* 9, Hanover, 337-364.



# TRANSLATING WITH BOOKS:



## Leonardo Bruni as a theorist of intertextuality in translation

By Anna Wegener

*Abstract: This essay employs a framework proposed by Lawrence Venuti to consider Leonardo Bruni's On the Correct Way to Translate as a theory of intertextuality in translation. The essay sheds light on Bruni's thoughts about relations between the source text and other texts, relations between the source text and the translation, and relations between the translation and other texts, particularly those between two translations of the same source text into the same target language. As regards the latter set of intertextual relations, the essay specifically emphasizes that Bruni's treatise is a seminal text not only about translation, but also about retranslation. The literature addressing On the Correct Way to Translate is primarily historicizing in its approach, positioning it within the context of Renaissance translation theory and practise. While this essay draws in part on existing research on Bruni, it also seeks to wrestle his treatise from a historicist grip by applying Venuti's framework and juxtaposing the text with other modern translation theories. The overall aim is to bring into clearer focus Bruni's awareness that translating implies engaging with numerous textual sources in both the source and target languages.*

### Introduction

In the 1420s the Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni (1374–1444) wrote his celebrated short treatise on how translation should be carried out, in Latin titled *De interpretatione recta* (On the Correct Way to Translate). In this text, Bruni explores Latin translations of the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, characterizing them in the following way:

Aristotle himself and Plato were, I may say, the very greatest masters of literature, and practiced a most elegant kind of writing filled with the sayings and maxims of the old poets and orators and historians, and

frequently employed tropes and figures of speech that have acquired idiomatic meanings far different from their literal meanings.<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle and Plato were not only philosophers, in Bruni's view they were also artists with words. Their work brings together both learning and stylistic brilliance. For this reason, translating Aristotle and Plato correctly into Latin is not just a matter of rendering the content of their thoughts precisely, it also entails recreating the way these thoughts were originally communicated and perceived in Greek. The elegance of Aristotle's and Plato's style stems partly from the philosophers' use of figurative language and partly from their quotations from and allusions to Greek poetry, rhetoric and historiography. Their works are, in various ways, repositories of the linguistic and literary traditions of the source culture in which they practiced their art.

As the above quotation shows, Leonardo Bruni was highly aware that the source texts he examined were caught up in relationships with other texts. It was this fact that led him to conclude that only an extremely well-read translator would be able to understand and translate them correctly. As I shall endeavor to show in this essay, however, *On the Correct Way to Translate* is also concerned with other kinds of intertextual relations that pose a challenge to the translator and condition the way he translates.<sup>2</sup>

### **Intertextuality and translation**

So far, intertextuality has not made its way to the top of the agenda in translation studies. 'Intertextuality' does not, for example, figure as a keyword in John Benjamins 4 volume *Handbook of Translation Studies* (2010–2013), edited by Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer. This oversight might be due to the fact that translation is an all-too-obvious form of intertextuality in and of itself. After all, as Gideon Toury's notion of assumed translation suggests, to regard a text as a translation one must assume that it is dependent on another text in another language and culture, that it is derived from this text through a process of transfer and that it shares certain features with its

---

<sup>1</sup> Bruni 1987a, 218. In this article, I will quote from James Hankins' English translation of Bruni's treatise and use its English title. I have read Bruni's treatise in all existing English and Italian translations and I referenced the Latin original when encountering words or passages that were rendered very differently by translators. I would like to thank Angelina Zontine for revising my English.

<sup>2</sup> Bruni's ideal translator is an educated man, so I use the masculine pronoun when referring to the translator. Bruni does not specify this, but women would generally not have had the possibility to benefit from the long and expensive training required to learn the literary Latin that Bruni championed. See Hankins 1987, 212.

source.<sup>3</sup> Translations are, by definition, intertextual texts. However, translation scholars' reluctance to designate relations between the source and target texts 'intertextual' might also have something to do with the slippery nature of the concept of intertextuality and the fact that scholars already have many other terms at their disposal to characterize the original-translation relationship, for example, different notions of equivalence. This latter fact may indicate that, in reality, translation scholars are already exploring various kinds of intertextual relations involved in translation, but they are doing so without relying on – or by relying on only partially – the terminology of intertextuality.<sup>4</sup>

In the early 1980s, however, various theorists began to write about translation in the context of theories of intertextuality. Early examples are Susan Bassnett (1980), Gérard Genette (1982), Katharina Reiss and Hans J. Vermeer (1984), Manfred Pfister (1985) and Werner von Koppenfels (1985). Bassnett refers in passing to Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality to point out that the prose translator's unit of translation is the source text, located within its specific historical context and understood in its dialectical relationship with other texts.<sup>5</sup> Genette, on the other hand, sees translation as a hypertextual practice that consists of transposing a text from one language to another (linguistic transposition).<sup>6</sup> Translation in Genette's view is an instance of hypertextuality in that it is derived from and would be unable to exist without its hypotext.<sup>7</sup> Reiss and Vermeer term the relationship between the translation and the source text 'intertextual coherence' or 'fidelity' and argue that, while there should exist a relationship between the two texts, the exact form this relationship takes depends on "the translator's interpretation of the source text and on the translation *Skopos*."<sup>8</sup> Pfister, attempting to synthesize theories of intertextuality – from 'global' poststructuralist theories to 'local' structuralist or hermeneutic ones – proposes a set of six criteria by which to gauge the so-called "intensity" of the intertextual reference, finding that translations are highly intertextual texts according to the criterion of 'structurality', that is, the criterion describing the degree to which a text

---

<sup>3</sup> Toury 2012, 28-31.

<sup>4</sup> For example, some kinds of so-called 'textual voices' could be considered 'intertextual traces'. See Alvstad and Rosa 2015, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bassnett 1980/2002, 82, 117.

<sup>6</sup> Genette 1982, 293–299. In this article I will be quoting from the English translation of *Palimpsestes*: Genette 1997. Although Genette's key concept is that of hypertextuality, his book is generally considered a structuralist theory of intertextuality. See Allen 2011, 92-129. For overviews of theories of intertextuality I refer to Allen's book and to Pfister 1985.

<sup>7</sup> Genette 1982, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Nord 1997, 32. I rely on Nord's paraphrase of Reiss and Vermeer's position.

structurally depends on another.<sup>9</sup> Werner von Koppenfels's 1985 article on literary translation, "Die literarische Übersetzung", is instead an attempt to demonstrate how useful the concept of intertextuality, understood as "the aesthetically fruitful tension to the foreign model", is for translation criticism.<sup>10</sup> The history of translation criticism, von Koppenfels argues, shows that translations have often been deemed defective or secondary because they aim for but cannot completely reproduce the source text in the target language. However, since intertextuality as a mode of textual production falls under the law of both repetition and change, viewing translation as a form of intertextuality allows us to recognize that the translation, in establishing a literary relationship with the original, vigorously demonstrates its own literary worth. To escape from the impasse of traditional translation criticism, von Koppenfels insists, one must realize that the dialectic between repetition and poetical transformation is part of the essence of literary translation.<sup>11</sup>

A recent attempt to combine intertextuality studies and translation studies is represented by Lawrence Venuti's 2009 article, "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation".<sup>12</sup> Venuti's starting point is the observation that foreign intertexts are rarely recreated with any completeness or precision in translation, because "translating is fundamentally a decontextualizing process."<sup>13</sup> In translation, the foreign text is uprooted from the various foreign-language contexts (linguistic, cultural and social) that support it and grant it meaning. However, at the same time the text is recontextualized; it is rewritten in a different language, thereby being situated in a different culture and, often, a different historical moment, and promoted and mediated differently than it was in the source culture. Translation, according to Venuti, therefore implies both an immense loss, a loss of foreign contexts, and an immense gain in that the text acquires meanings and effects through recontextualization that function only in the target language and culture.

It is Venuti's view that foreign intertexts generally cannot be reproduced in translation by what he terms 'lexicographical equivalence',<sup>14</sup> that is, by adhering closely to the denotative meanings of words and phrases, since the

---

<sup>9</sup> Pfister 1985, 28. According to Pfister, poststructuralist theories operate with a global model of intertextuality according to which every text is part of a universal intertext, whereas structuralist and hermeneutic models restrict the concept of intertextuality to intentional and explicit connections between a given text and other texts.

<sup>10</sup> "Die ästhetisch fruchtbare Spannung zur Fremdvorlage." Von Koppenfels 1985, 139.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–140.

<sup>12</sup> Other recent attempts include Hermans 2003, Venuti 2004, Bassnett 2007, Federici 2007, Sakellariou 2015, Koskinen & Paloposki 2015, and Liu 2017, 10–20.

<sup>13</sup> Venuti 2009, 158.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

intertextual references thus translated would prove incomprehensible to target readers. Instead, translators will often attempt to substitute foreign intertexts with intertexts that are relevant and recognizable to target readers, but in aiming for such dynamic equivalence they create a disjunction between the source text and the translation.<sup>15</sup> The most important point made in Venuti's article, which is indebted to poststructuralism,<sup>16</sup> is that by substituting foreign intertexts with domestic ones the translator not only interprets the source text; at times s/he also calls it into question along with texts in the translating culture. The receiving intertexts occasionally cast a critical light on both the foreign text and other target-culture texts, although translators may not have anticipated that their translations would function in this particular way. Indeed, according to Venuti, the interrogative force of the intertextual relationships established by a translation may arise from interpretive choices that were not deliberate on the part of the translator and whose effects can only be grasped after the fact by 'an informed readership.'<sup>17</sup>

In the beginning of the article, Venuti points out that translation represents "a unique case of intertextuality" in that it involves three sets of intertextual relations:

- 1) Those between the foreign text and other texts, whether written in the foreign language or in a different one;
- 2) those between the foreign text and the translation, which have traditionally been treated according to concepts of equivalence;
- and 3) those between the translation and other texts, whether written in the translating language or a different one.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Venuti essentially once again takes up the attack he had levelled against Eugene Nida's concept of 'dynamic equivalence' in *The Translator's Invisibility*, that is, a type of equivalence aimed at "producing in the ultimate receptors a response similar to that of the original receptors" (Nida 1964, quoted in Venuti 2008, 16). However, in the 2009 essay, Venuti's critique is not framed by the conceptual duo of foreignizing and domesticating translation, but by his thoughts about the possibility of and strategies for translating foreign intertexts. See Venuti 2008, 16–18, and Venuti 2009, 159.

<sup>16</sup> Venuti explicitly writes that his model reader, the reader who reads a translation as a translation and is able to grasp and critically formulate the significance of intertextual relationships in translation, "deploys and develops ideas about language and translation that have been formulated by poststructuralist thinkers like Derrida and [Philip] Lewis [...]" *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>18</sup> Venuti 2009, 158. Translation is probably not as unique a case of intertextuality as Venuti claims, since other hypertexts, to draw on Genette's terminology, would also involve these three sets of intertextual relations. For a different view of the unique intertextual character of translation, see von Koppenfels 1985, 138. For this latter author, what distinguishes literary translation is that it ideally aims for a total reproduction of the source text, its contents as well as its form, in a new linguistic environment. The uniqueness of literary

Whereas in the 1980s scholars such as Susan Bassnett opened up new ways of understanding how the source text is surrounded by and entangled with other texts, Venuti's sets of intertextual relations highlight the fact that the translator engages explicitly and implicitly, consciously and unconsciously, with multiple texts in both the source-language and target-language environments. The translation is thus related not only to the source text but also to other texts, as when the translator quotes other translations, imitates a target-language writer or takes up a critical position vis-à-vis a previous translation of the source text.

The fact that translating requires the translator to engage with numerous other texts besides the source text he is reading and the translation he is writing was a point of which Leonardo Bruni was acutely aware. In this article, I wish to draw attention to and explore this specific feature of his thinking about translation. I will adopt the overall framework proposed by Venuti and investigate what Bruni has to say about the three sets of intertextual relations involved in translation according to the American scholar. Furthermore, I will juxtapose Bruni's treatise with other important present-day theories of intertextuality and translation, first and foremost that of Genette and a cluster of theories on retranslation, whereby I seek to highlight the specificity of Bruni's position, his dual closeness to and distance from modern thinking about translation.

In so doing, I also have a more polemical goal, namely to wrest his treatise from the historicist grip. There is an extensive body of research literature on Bruni's treatise, as documented for instance by the footnotes accompanying Stefano Baldassarri's 2003 Italian introduction to and translation of the text.<sup>19</sup> Judging from the bibliographical references included in his notes, it would seem that contributions generally tend to follow Bruni back into his own time and culture, focusing, for example, on the identity of the medieval translator criticized by Bruni, Bruni's self-understanding as a translator, Étienne Dolet's debt to Bruni, the relationship between Bruni's treatise and other humanist theories of translation, and other similar arguments. I will rely on the existing 'specialist' literature on Bruni's treatise to some extent,<sup>20</sup> but my aim is to set

---

translation lies in this goal. However, this being impossible, it compensates for the loss which the foreign text undergoes during the translation process by drawing on the linguistic and aesthetic resources of the target culture.

<sup>19</sup> Baldassarri 2003, 93–103, 193–218.

<sup>20</sup> I use the term 'specialist' here in the sense intended by David Damrosch. He argues that specialists, working for example in departments of national literature, strive to understand a literary work in the context of its home culture. In contrast, world literature scholars – of which Damrosch himself is a distinguished representative – “encounter the work not at

up a dialogue between *On the Correct Way to Translate* and modern theories and to use this dialogue to bring into clearer focus Bruni's awareness that translating implies engaging with numerous textual sources in both the source and target languages.

### *On the Correct Way to Translate*

The point of departure for *On the Correct Way to Translate* is the debate spurred by Bruni's critique of a medieval Latin translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, one of the fundamental texts of the medieval university curriculum. In the preface to his own translation of Aristotle's work, dedicated to pope Martin V, Bruni had lambasted the previous translator for his many errors and somewhat rudely characterized his translational performance as "clumsy" and "clownish".<sup>21</sup> Bruni's preface had in turn been criticized by a correspondent named Demetrius for presenting an inaccurate image of Aristotle as an eloquent philosopher and for being excessively severe in its evaluation of the previous translation.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Demetrius argued that the medieval translator was actually the philosopher Boethius and not a representative of the Dominican order, as Bruni had asserted in his preface.<sup>23</sup> Through his treatise, Bruni sought to explain why he was convinced his previous assessment had not been excessively harsh but simply fair, detailing not only what he believed to be the essence of translation and requirements of a good translator but also once again finding fault with a medieval translation – this time Aristotle's *Politics* rather than his *Nicomachean Ethics* – on the assumption that the two works shared the same translator.

According to Bruni, "the whole essence of translation is to transfer correctly what is written in one language into another language."<sup>24</sup> Only the translator who fulfills two specific requirements will be able to produce a correct translation, however. First of all, he must have "a wide and extensive

---

the heart of its source culture but in the field of force generated among works that may come from very different cultures and eras." See Damrosch 2003, 300.

<sup>21</sup> Bruni 1987b, 213.

<sup>22</sup> It is not clear who Demetrius – or Demetrios – was. For attempts to determine his identity see Hankins 2003, 195 and Botley 2004, 44, note 180.

<sup>23</sup> Hankins 1987, 201–202. Bruni answered Demetrius' objections in a letter. According to Hankins, Bruni was upset by his criticisms and used "On the Correct Way to Translate" to elaborate and expand on many of the arguments originally contained in the letter to Demetrius. In the 1430s Bruni faced another, more sophisticated opponent to his translation of Aristotle, namely the Spanish bishop Alfonso of Cartagena (1384–1456), whose charges Bruni also refuted in a series of letters. *Ibid.*, 203–208. See also Botley 2004, 53–58.

<sup>24</sup> Bruni 1987a, 218.

knowledge of both languages.”<sup>25</sup> In Bruni’s view, the translator should even be equally proficient in the source and target languages. He does not write this explicitly, but his use of the same couple of semantically related yet distinct nouns (*iuventus/iuventa*) to illustrate the degree of lexical discernment required of the translator as regards the source and target languages indicates that he believed the translator’s knowledge of Greek should somehow mirror his knowledge of Latin.<sup>26</sup> Bruni’s ideal translator was thus a bilingual individual (or effectively trilingual, since the translator’s first language must have been a vernacular tongue). However, even though Bruni may be said to have posed the translator’s equal mastery of both languages as a condition for producing a good translation, he was clearly not interested in exploring translation in both directions; for Bruni, translation took place in only one direction: Greek was the source language, Latin the target language.

As Nike Pokorn has shown, some strands of modern translation theory assume that translators should be perfectly bilingual speakers of both the source and target languages, and in light of these theories Bruni’s requirement may appear self-evident; however, on closer scrutiny we discover that his requirement is different from the one posed by modern theorists.<sup>27</sup> In the early fifteenth century, knowledge of Greek was the privilege of a restricted intellectual elite and it took years of intense study to master the classical Latin that Bruni championed. His target language could thus only be acquired by deliberate and laborious training. Bruni’s treatise does not present the same view as that of present-day translation studies because many translation scholars today take for granted, as Pokorn has pointed out, that only translation into one’s mother tongue will guarantee a fluent and idiomatic translation. To question this assumption, she analyzed different English translations of the same source texts (written in Slovene), some translated by native speakers of English, others not, and examined responses to these translations by educated target readers. Her finding was that the translator’s mother tongue “proved not to be a criterion according to which the quality of the translation or faithfulness to the original could be accessed.”<sup>28</sup> She also emphasized that the idea that one should never translate out of one’s mother tongue – so-called ‘inverse translation’ – is not and has never been a universally accepted principle, mentioning, among other points, that all the great Greek patristical and philosophical works were translated into Latin by

---

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>26</sup> Bruni 1996, 155, 159. All of Bruni’s examples of the translator’s command of the source language are Latin and not Greek.

<sup>27</sup> Pokorn 2005, 3, 28-30.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

translators who did not speak it natively, and that Martin Luther could be seen as the first exponent of the belief that one can only translate satisfactorily into one's mother tongue.<sup>29</sup>

Since Bruni strove to revive and imitate the Latin of classical antiquity, a language which was only acquired by study, he may be said to have written a treatise about how to translate from one foreign language into another foreign language, from classical Greek to classical Latin. This fact makes *On the Correct Way to Translate* radically different from mainstream modern translation theory, if we accept Pokorn's observation that most scholars today believe that translation must be done into and never out of one's mother tongue. However, one might also say that *On the Correct Way to Translate* is indeed a treatise about translating into a mother tongue, if by this term we mean not the language one learns first as a child – little Leonardo must have spoken Tuscan with his mother or nursemaid – but the language one knows best, uses most, identifies with and is identified by, all of which are possible definitions of the term 'mother tongue' according to Pokorn.<sup>30</sup>

Bruni's second requirement is that the translator be able to combine knowledge with action, comprehension with restating. There are people who are capable of understanding a concept but unable to express what they have understood. Bruni compares these people to art and music critics who know how to evaluate the quality of a painting or a song but cannot paint or sing themselves. This comparison suggests that, in Bruni's opinion, translators can be likened to painters and singers. The translator is thus not 'merely' a man with a profound knowledge of Greek and Latin gained through study; he is also a kind of artist, a person endowed with considerable literary skills of his own.<sup>31</sup>

Viewed in the context of Bruni's other writings from the same period such as his famous 1424 treatise dedicated to Lady Battista Malatesta of Montefeltro, his ideal translator represents but one possible example of a truly learned individual. In this text, Bruni advises Battista on how to become a woman of letters. She should not only be familiar with the best authors, first and foremost of divinity and moral philosophy, but should likewise possess

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 34, 24.

<sup>30</sup> I thank Marianne Pade for sharing her knowledge of Bruni's 'mother tongue' with me. Personal e-mail communication 27 March 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Stefano Baldassarri highlights this aspect of Bruni's ideal translator by translating the title of treatise as "L'arte del tradurre" (The Art of Translating). The Italian scholar probably invokes the Greek concept of *technē*, meaning "any productive activity" and traditionally translated by 'art', 'craft' or 'technique' (Parks 2004, 5). Baldassarri's translation thus highlights how Bruni's translator does things in a certain way to obtain concrete results.

“a well-developed and respectable literary skill” of her own.<sup>32</sup> There is no purpose in knowing many things if one cannot talk or write about them with taste and distinction, just as there is no advantage in being a brilliant writer if one has nothing interesting to say. In Bruni’s memorable phrasing: “Literary skill without knowledge is useless and sterile; and knowledge, however extensive, fades into the shadows without the glorious lamp of literature.”<sup>33</sup> In both texts, the treatise on translation and letter to Battista Malatesta, Bruni emphasizes individuals who are “doubly educated”, that is who have knowledge and are able to communicate what they know.<sup>34</sup> The literary skills of a woman of letters – and, one may infer, of a translator – are to some degree the byproduct of her search for knowledge, since Bruni believed she should let herself be instructed only by authors who were also paragons of literary excellence.

Given the fact that *On the Correct Way to Translate* originates from a heated debate about the quality of a previous translation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and Bruni’s right to and ways of criticizing his predecessor’s work, the treatise is necessarily quite concerned with relations between the translation and other texts, in this case translations of the same source text. This is the third set of intertextual relations that Venuti identifies as being involved in translation, although he does not examine intertextuality between two translations of the same source text in “Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation”.<sup>35</sup> However, Bruni’s work is equally concerned with the other two relations outlined by the American scholar. Bruni is aware that the source text is surrounded by and incorporates multiple other source cultural texts and he takes pains to describe the kind of relationship which he believes should exist between the source text and translation.

#### **a. Intertextual relations between the foreign text and other texts**

What Bruni has to say about the first set of intertextual relations involved in translation is connected to his ideas about the translator’s command of the source language. The translator’s knowledge of it should, Bruni explains, be “no small or common knowledge at that, but one that is wide, idiomatic,

---

<sup>32</sup> Bruni 1987c, 250.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>35</sup> In his 2004 article “Retranslations: The Creation of Value” Venuti does, however, discuss retranslations in relation to the concept of intertextuality. In this case, however, he is mostly interested in the links retranslations establish with other texts in the translating culture and not so much in the relationship between two translations of the same source text. Venuti 2004, 31–34.

accurate, and detailed, acquired from a long reading of the philosophers and orators and poets and all other writers.”<sup>36</sup> As a translator, Bruni had early on discovered that it was impossible to translate the classical Greek writers without having a solid grounding in the source culture. As Hankins has pointed out, when translating Demosthenes (between 1406 and 1412) Bruni realized that he needed to gain familiarity with Greek history and legal procedures in order to understand the Greek orator.<sup>37</sup>

To be well-read in Greek literature proves important in the case of Aristotle and Plato, whose works are, in Bruni’s opinion, packed with intertextual references. This view of the two philosophers is a recurrent position of Bruni’s. He expresses this idea in the treatise on translation and in the above-mentioned treatise to Battista Malatesta, where he draws attention to the vast literary erudition of the two Greek thinkers. Aristotle, for example, “frequently cites passages of Homer, Hesiod, Pindar, Euripides, and the other poets, showing by his familiar knowledge and ready quotation of them that he was no less a student of the poets than of the philosophers.”<sup>38</sup>

Bruni thus demands that the translator acquire knowledge of the source language by reading many different kinds of source-language authors. He would have agreed with Antoine Berman’s argument in his *Toward a Translation of Criticism: John Donne*, that translating requires numerous and various readings and that “[o]ne translates with books, and not only with dictionaries.”<sup>39</sup> By reading, one not only learns the foreign language but also becomes acquainted with the foreign culture and its literary traditions, and both forms of knowledge must be put to use when translating. We could therefore safely assume that Bruni’s ideal translator is not only bilingual – he is also bicultural.

Bruni supports his requirement that the translator possess an extensive knowledge of the source language by offering various examples of what might happen if this requirement were not met. He shows, for example, how an ignorant translator might misconstrue idiomatic expressions, that is, expressions that have acquired a meaning through usage not deducible from the meanings of the individual words, by reading them literally. He also emphasizes the problem of understanding allusions. They are, in Bruni’s opinion, common in Aristotle’s and Plato’s writings; to prove his point, he indicates three instances in which Aristotle references Homer.<sup>40</sup> An allusion,

---

<sup>36</sup> Bruni 1987a, 218.

<sup>37</sup> Hankins 2003, 261.

<sup>38</sup> Bruni 1987c, 246.

<sup>39</sup> Berman 2009, 52.

<sup>40</sup> Bruni 1987a, 219.

or a reference to something, is described by Genette as “an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible.”<sup>41</sup> Allusions are thus puzzling or impenetrable to readers who are not familiar with the previous text being referenced. Through these examples, Bruni highlights the fact that there is no intertextuality without a reader who can recognize these references and understand what they mean in their new textual environment. Or, to rephrase Bruni’s basic point in Venuti’s words, “reception is a decisive factor with intertextuality.”<sup>42</sup>

In *On the Correct Way to Translate*, Bruni thus scrutinizes source texts which are caught up in relations with other texts and argues that this intertextuality poses restrictions in terms of who would be capable of translating them. He examines these relations at the level of what Genette calls “semantic-semiotic microstructures”, that is, at the level of words, expressions and short texts.<sup>43</sup> One might also say that Bruni is concerned with the intertextual trace, the “pictorial detail” – to use another quotation from Genette – rather than the foreign text’s more general structural dependency on other previous texts.<sup>44</sup>

#### **b. Intertextual relations between the foreign text and the translation**

In “Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation,” Venuti argued that translation does not leave the original unaltered. Indeed, he claimed that the intertextual relations established by a translation may have a double interrogative power.<sup>45</sup> The informed reader, the reader who accepts that a translation is a translation and not a transparent communication of the foreign text, may discern how the receiving intertext affects both the source text and texts in the translating culture. Unlike Venuti, Bruni does not delve into the potentially undermining effects of the intertextual relationships established

---

<sup>41</sup> Genette 1997, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Venuti 2009, 157.

<sup>43</sup> Genette 1997, 2. I quote from the English translation, but it is worth noting that the French original has “micro-structures sémantico-stylistiques” and not, as the English translation would indicate, “sémantico-sémiotiques”. Cf. Genette 1982, 9.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Genette, in contrast, is interested precisely in exploring the structural dependency of texts on preexisting ones. The focus of *Palimpsests* is hypertextuality, that is, the transtextual relationship between two texts, A and B, in cases where text B does not speak of text A, but would be unable to exist at all without it. In contrast, in Genette’s terminology intertextuality is the effective presence of text A in text B. Intertextuality is therefore a less pervasive type of transtextual relationship than hypertextuality because it ‘only’ denotes the presence of shorter or longer stretches of text (quotations, allusions, etc.) in the text at hand.

<sup>45</sup> Venuti 2009, 167.

by the translation, but the idea that a translation may negatively influence the original – and that the intertextual relations between the two texts thus go both ways, from original to translation and from translation to original – holds a prominent place in his thinking.

I have borrowed the expression “pictorial detail” from Genette to argue that Bruni’s exploration of the intertextual relations between the source text and other texts is conducted at the level of microstructures, as if he were holding a magnifying glass up to a painting to examine a part of it in detail, as for instance when he points out that Aristotle uses a quotation from the *Iliad* about Helen’s grace and beauty as “a figure for the nature of pleasure.”<sup>46</sup> However, Bruni’s thinking is also informed by notions of translations as complete distorted pictorial representations of originals. He believes that translations have the power to debase, defile and destroy originals, as is clear from the way he describes the iconoclastic force of the medieval translator of Aristotle, comparing him to a vandal slashing and ruining a precious painting. The translator did not simply add a playful moustache to the portrait of a beautiful lady; he ruthlessly destroyed the masterpiece. To describe the proper attitude the translator ought to assume vis-à-vis the original author and his work, Bruni once again resorts to a comparison with painters and their creations:

Just as men who copy a painting borrow the shape, attitude, stance and general appearance therefrom, not thinking what they themselves would do, but what another has done; so in translation the best translator will turn his whole mind, heart, and will to his original author, and in a sense transform himself, considering how he may express the shape, attitude, and stance of his speech, and all his lines and colors.<sup>47</sup>

The translator copies a literary work of art just as an artist might copy a work of visual art.<sup>48</sup> The real message in this comparison lies in the fact that, as

---

<sup>46</sup> Bruni 1987a, 219.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 220 Hankins’ translation has been slightly modified. The Latin original reads: “Ut enim ii, qui ad exemplum picture picturam aliam pingunt, figuram et statum et ingressum et totius corporis formam inde assumunt nec, quid ipsi facerent, sed, quid alter ille fecerit, meditantur: sic in traductionibus interpretes quidem optimi sese in primum scribendi auctorem tota mente et animo et voluntate convertet et quodammodo transformabit eiusque orationis figuram, statum, ingressum coloremque et liniamenta cuncta exprimere meditabitur,” Bruni 1996, 160.

<sup>48</sup> Many modern translation scholars would not agree with Bruni’s idea of the mental stance the translator ought to assume vis-à-vis the original author and his work. In *The Translator’s Invisibility*, for example, Venuti argues that the translator’s identification with the author is a negative result of the individualistic concept of authorship pervasive in Anglo-American culture, which devalues translation. See Venuti 2008, 6-7. It would also seem that present-day translators do not use metaphors from the field of pictorial arts, preferring instead

Genette writes, while there is no aesthetic value in copying a piece of literature or music, “producing a good painting or sculpture in the manner of a master requires a technical competence that is, in principle, equal to the model’s.”<sup>49</sup> Through this comparison, therefore, Bruni suggests that translation is difficult because the translator’s goal is to *match* the original author, and indeed he also makes this point explicitly elsewhere. However, his comparison would seem to obscure the fact that, whereas a painter copying a painting is employing the same materials as the master he is copying, the translator and the original author, although both working with language, do not share the same linguistic code. Furthermore, Bruni’s pictorial metaphor and description of the translator’s identification with the author – Baldassarri terms it the translator’s “mimetic impulse” – fails to take into consideration the fact that not only differences between the two languages but also temporal and cultural distance between the source and target texts would complicate any claim that the translation is a replica of the original.<sup>50</sup>

However, Bruni is well aware that a translation is not a reproduction of the original text, pure and simple. The relationship between the two texts is one of analogy rather than identity. The translator’s task is to make sure that Aristotle acquires a standing in Latin that is comparable to the one he enjoyed in Greek. As Bruni puts it in the preface to his translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “[Aristotle] would surely wish to appear among the Latins as he has made himself appear among the Greeks.”<sup>51</sup> The philosopher was, in Bruni’s view, eloquent and conceptually profound in Greek, and therefore his work should possess these same characteristics in Latin as well. To achieve this end, the translator, drawing on his wide knowledge of the target language, should imitate the best and most approved classical writers of Latin. The relationship between the original and translation that Bruni sets out to attain thus ties the translation closely to other texts in the target-language culture (the third set of intertextual relations, according to Venuti). To make Aristotle speak in a ‘pure’ Latin diction, the translator should steer clear of borrowings from Greek; he should, for example, not ‘dot’ his translation with coinages

---

the sphere of music (“the translator is a performer”) to describe their work. See Zanotti 2011, 81–83. The abandonment of the pictorial metaphor could be related to the fact that copying a painting has come to be seen as a beginner’s task, the kind of exercise appropriate for a novice. At least, this is the point André Lefevere makes when he translates the above-quoted passage of Bruni’s treatise in the following manner: “Those who *learn to paint by trying to copy* an existing painting ponder the problem of how to transfer the shape, the stance, the gait, and the contours of the body not as they would make them, but as somebody else did make them.” See Bruni 1992, 84 (emphasis added).

<sup>49</sup> Genette 1997, 386.

<sup>50</sup> Baldassarri 2003, 100.

<sup>51</sup> Bruni 1987b, 213.

such as *aristocratia*, *democratia* and *oligarchia*.<sup>52</sup> In Bruni's view, the translator who transliterates Greek words is, as he writes somewhat rudely, "a mongrel, half Greek and half Latin; deficient in both languages, competent in neither."<sup>53</sup> In this sense, the translation should not reveal its intertextual dependence on the source text, if by intertextual dependence we follow von Koppenfels in understanding that a translation openly communicates its intertextual nature when it consciously violates the norms of the target language by borrowing linguistic and stylistic structures from the original. This is a practise which von Koppenfels dates back to Romanticism and which, drawing on Bertold Brecht's terminology, he terms "alienating translation".<sup>54</sup>

Bruni would not be able to claim that the translator should avoid transliterating Greek words if he did not believe that Latin was perfectly capable of rendering a message written in Greek. "There has never been anything said in Greek that cannot be said in Latin", he famously remarks, referring to a passage in Cicero's *De finibus*.<sup>55</sup> Given this view, it is likewise no surprise that his treatise does not contain any discussion of untranslatable words or phrases, although he admits that several of the previous translator's blunders arise from the fact that some Greek words are indeed difficult to translate.

At this point, however, a modern reader of *On the Correct Way to Translate* is bound to notice an important difference as regards the degree of explicitness with which Bruni addresses specific translation problems in his treatise. According to Finnish translation scholar Ritva Leppihalme, there are various kinds of culture-bound concepts that may create problems in translation. Some of them regard extralinguistic phenomena that are natural (e.g. topography) as well as man-made (e.g. social institutions). Leppihalme finds that extralinguistic problems are often expressed as lexical ones: "[I]s there a word in the target language (TL) for a given feature of the source-language (SL) world?"<sup>56</sup> In Bruni's view, there are indeed words in Latin for the political institutions of ancient Greece. Phrased differently, when he points out that the medieval translator ought to have written *paucorum potentia* instead of *oligarchia*, *popularis status* instead of *democratia* and *optimorum*

---

<sup>52</sup> For Bruni's critique of the transliteration of Greek words, see also Marianne Pade's contribution to this volume.

<sup>53</sup> Bruni 1987b, 213.

<sup>54</sup> Von Koppenfels 1985, 142.

<sup>55</sup> Bruni 1987a, 228. Baldassarri points out Bruni's dependence on Cicero's text (*De finibus*, 1.3.10). See Bruni 2003, 216, note 47.

<sup>56</sup> Leppihalme 1997, 2.

*gubernatio* instead of *aristocratia* he insists that Latin is just as *lexically* rich as Greek.<sup>57</sup>

In Leppihalme's view, however, there are other culture-bound translation problems which are instead primarily "intralinguistic and pragmatic", involving "implicit messages grounded in the source culture".<sup>58</sup> Allusions are an example of such implicit messages. As we saw, Bruni insisted that Plato's and Aristotle's works contained numerous allusions to the Greek literary tradition. However, whereas the Italian humanist explicitly writes that the translator should find Latin lexical equivalents of Greek words and also offers examples of such substitutions, he does not really indicate what should be done with the other type of culture-bound items, beyond repeatedly stating that the translator should be able to recognize them thanks to his profound knowledge of the source culture. Should the translator find equivalents for them in Latin or should he just translate them? This question raises another one: What competences did the reader of Bruni's translation have in the source culture? As we saw, in Bruni's opinion the translator should be not only bilingual but bicultural. But what about target readers?

Is it realistic to expect them to be bicultural also? Is the receiver participation which the use of allusions presupposes possible when texts are transferred from source language culture to target language culture?<sup>59</sup>

As I will show below, it is clear from the treatise that Bruni did not imagine his reader would know any Greek. Indeed, the target reader figures in the text as someone who might be led astray by the old translation because he or she was unable to access the original.<sup>60</sup> Since Bruni advised against translating idiomatic expressions word for word and urged the translator to identify the meaning of the entire expression and locate Latin equivalents, he might also have favoured the substitution of Greek allusions with Latin ones, although he does not provide any examples of such substitutions. The problem of translating culture-bound items such as allusions points to the fact that the translator and his target reader have an extremely unequal degree of knowledge of the source culture, an asymmetry which would make any straightforward translation of allusions highly problematic because a reader unfamiliar with Greek would simply not be able to understand them.

---

<sup>57</sup> Bruni 1987a, 228. Marianne Pade has recently explored the origins of the terminology adopted by Bruni to render the names of Greek constitutions. See Pade 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Leppihalme 1997, 3.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>60</sup> Bruni 1987a, 220. Bruni argues that a poor translation has two damaging effects: It "leads men into divers error" and threatens the "majesty" of the original author.

### c. Intertextual relations between the translation and other texts

According to Paul Botley, Bruni did more than any other scholar to revive the typology of competitive translation known from Antiquity, when students translated Greek orators as part of their training in rhetoric in order to learn and later employ their techniques in Latin productions.<sup>61</sup> Their translations were competitive in that they set out to equal or perhaps even excel the Greek texts. Bruni's desire for his translation to compete with the original cannot be separated from his drive to substitute the latter, however. In *On the Correct Way to Translate*, the clearest example of his belief in the translation's capacity to replace the original probably stems from what he does rather than what he says. When seeking to demonstrate that Plato's writing is rhythmic and elegant, Bruni quotes from his own translation of Plato. The translation is a stand-in for the original, and Bruni points to a specific feature of the original by pointing to a specific feature of the translation.<sup>62</sup> His choice to quote from the translation does not, however, rest on sheer pride in what he has accomplished; it also reflects his recognition of the fact that his readers would not be able to appreciate the qualities of Plato's original Greek writing for themselves.<sup>63</sup>

As a translator, Bruni not only competed with the original author, he also competed with other translators. Indeed, the competitive translation is typologically characterized by its agonistic relationship not only with the source text, but also with other translations of the source. As Botley points out, translators in Antiquity measured "their skill in their own language against the skill of the author of the original text, or against the virtues of other Latin versions."<sup>64</sup> Bruni's own translation of Aristotle's *Ethics* was meant to contend with and ultimately substitute the medieval translation.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Botley 2004, 170–173.

<sup>62</sup> Bruni 1987a, 222.

<sup>63</sup> Botley points out that "neither Bruni nor Manetti had had any missionary zeal for the propagation of Greek Studies. They did not encourage, and they did not expect, their readers to learn Greek." Botley 2004, 176. However, Bruni probably expected that some of the readers of *On the Correct Way to Translate* were other translators and they, of course, would be able to understand Plato and Aristotle in Greek. By providing his own translations, Bruni demonstrated his own mastery as a translator to these fellow translators who would have recalled the various difficulties inherent in the two philosophers' texts.

<sup>64</sup> Botley 2004, 170.

<sup>65</sup> Bruni notes in a 1435 letter that Italy was soon filled with copies of his translation and that it was even "discussed at public lectures in universities." Quoted from Hankins 2003, 196. By penetrating the university institution, Bruni's translation could be said to compete with the medieval translation because it was at the universities that this text was generally read and taught. By the 16th century, the medieval translation had been supplanted by Bruni's and other translators' versions of Aristotle. *Ibid.*, 220.

The fact that Bruni both competed with a previous translator and maintained an aggressive and self-confident stance towards this predecessor is evident in *On the Correct Way to Translate*. Any reader of the treatise cannot fail to notice how Bruni's argument rests on numerous comparisons between his own work and that of the medieval translator, and how the destructive force Bruni attributes to his predecessor (as regards the latter's treatment of the source text) is somehow repeated by Bruni himself in his panning of this nameless foregoer's work.

*On the Correct Way to Translate* is thus also a treatise about retranslation. Admittedly, whereas Bruni explicitly lays down guidelines as to the relationship that ought to exist between the original and the translation, he does not openly reflect on the relationship that might pertain between two translations of the same source text, perhaps because Bruni believed that there were no connections at all between his own translation of Aristotle and that of his predecessor.<sup>66</sup> When it comes to retranslation, the Italian humanist is not so much a theorist of intertextuality in translation as a practitioner who furnishes an example, perhaps a prototypical one, of how translators may polemically represent their predecessors' work.

*On the Correct Way to Translate* has often been termed the very first or, more modestly, the first modern treatise on translation.<sup>67</sup> It is important to recognize that this text is also about retranslation, however, as this fact obliges us to understand that a strong impetus for the theory (and practice) of translation are previous translations and their perceived mistakes or misinterpretations. It is not difficult to see why the act of retranslation might give rise to theorizing about translation. As Venuti points out, "in the case of retranslations, the translator's agency is distinguished by a significant increase in *self-consciousness* that seeks to take into account the manifold conditions and consequences of translating."<sup>68</sup> In retranslating, or so Venuti suggests, translators are more explicitly aware of what they are doing because they have to offer not only an interpretation of the source-text but a markedly different interpretation than the one already available in the target language. This increased self-awareness on the part of retranslators may make them more prone to viewing translation in a general, 'theoretical' perspective.

According to Kaisa Koskinen and Outi Paloposki, retranslation as a product denotes "a second or later translation of a single source text into the

---

<sup>66</sup> There was, of course, at least one very important relationship between the two translations, which arose from the fact that Bruni had read the previous translation, found it inadequate, and saw his own work as an improvement on the medieval version.

<sup>67</sup> See for instance Hankins 1987, 210, Nergaard 1993, 34, Baldassari 2003, 99.

<sup>68</sup> Venuti 2004, 29 (my emphasis).

same target language.”<sup>69</sup> The phenomenon of retranslation has been the focus of an increasing number of studies in recent years. Scholars have investigated which texts have been retranslated, explored the differences between the linguistic and textual make-up of the first and second translations, sought to identify the causes for retranslation and so on. With the exception of so-called “passive retranslations” – a term used by Anthony Pym denoting retranslations “where there is likely to be little active rivalry between different versions and knowledge of one version does not conflict with knowledge of another”<sup>70</sup> – retranslation is “a polemical act by nature”, in Koskinen and Paloposki’s view.<sup>71</sup> The decision to retranslate a text is often based on the perception that the existing translation is lacking in one or more desirable qualities. The second translation does not always represent a critique of the first, however; indeed it may be assimilative, relying heavily on the previously published text.<sup>72</sup> A text the publisher labels ‘retranslation’ may in fact be a revised version of an old translation.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, a retranslation may not only keep an eye on the source text and other previous translations into the same language, it may also refer to translations into other languages.<sup>74</sup> The phenomenon of retranslation thus directs our attention to the fact that translations may draw on and enter into dialogue with numerous textual sources.

Some translation scholars have explored retranslations specifically within the framework of theories of intertextuality. For example, in his 2003 article “Translation, Equivalence and Intertextuality”, Theo Hermans offers a brief but interesting discussion of intertextual relations between two English translations of Anne Frank’s diary. Hermans discusses how Frank’s childhood friend Laureen Nussbaum tried to obtain permission to publish a revised version of the translation of the diary. When she was denied permission, she decided to intersperse her own alternative renderings of the text within the translation “as a kind of running commentary.”<sup>75</sup> They presented the English-speaking reader with a polemical dialogue between the existing translation and the one imagined by Nussbaum. According to Hermans, however, this dialogue would also have existed, albeit in a covert manner, if Nussbaum had been allowed to print her new translation. In the latter case Nussbaum would still have spoken both for her friend and against

---

<sup>69</sup> Koskinen & Paloposki 2010a, 295.

<sup>70</sup> Pym 1998, 82.

<sup>71</sup> Koskinen & Paloposki 2015, 27.

<sup>72</sup> Alvstad & Rosa 2015, 10.

<sup>73</sup> Koskinen & Paloposki 2010b, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Alvstad & Rosa 2015, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Hermans 2003, 41.

the previous translator. To recognize the oppositional nature of her translation the reader would have had to engage in a “double-edged reading”, a reading that pays heed not only to the relation between the translation and the original, but also to the “translation-specific intertextuality at work in the differential choices which translators make.”<sup>76</sup>

Another example of how translation scholars have discussed retranslations in relation to the concept of intertextuality is Koskinen and Paloposki’s 2015 article “Anxieties of Influence”. They draw on Harold Bloom’s notion of anxiety of influence in poetry to classify different attitudes adopted by retranslators vis-à-vis the first translator and argue that “the anxiety of influence is rarely if ever entirely absent, and should rather be considered one function of the field of translation.”<sup>77</sup> Except in the case of passive retranslations, retranslators must find a way of dealing with their precursors in order to find their own voice as translators.

Bruni’s attacks on the medieval translator were numerous and various in nature. Like Nussbaum, he compared the way he had translated specific words with his predecessor’s translational choices; unlike Nussbaum, however, Bruni’s critique constituted the central argument of the last part of his treatise instead of being relegated to brackets and footnotes. The medieval translator wrote *congregatio*, Bruni wrote *contio*; the medieval translator wrote *principatus*, Bruni wrote *magistratus*; the medieval translator wrote *praetoria*, Bruni wrote *iudicia*; the medieval translator wrote *honorabilitas*, Bruni wrote *census*.<sup>78</sup> His *On the Correct Way to Translate* stages a veritable boxing match of translational choices with Bruni in the role of the champion and the medieval translator as the defeated opponent, a match that enables us to witness the potential knock-out power of retranslation. However, his critique of his precursor not only regarded the way the latter translated words denoting the political institutions of ancient Greece; Bruni also found fault with the language employed in the translation more generally, as well as the style, genre and audience. We have already seen that Bruni advocated the use of ‘pure’ Latin and advised against transliterating Greek words. In fact, he reserved for himself the honour of having produced the first Latin translation of the *Ethics*, asserting that the medieval one was “not Latin at all.”<sup>79</sup> As for style, Bruni found that the medieval translator spoiled the “fullness and

---

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Koskinen & Paloposki 2015, 37. On Bloom, see Allen 2011, 130–140.

<sup>78</sup> Bruni 1987a, 225–227.

<sup>79</sup> Bruni 1987b, 217. If we were to accept Bruni’s statement, we would not be able to see his translation of Aristotle as a retranslation – and the treatise as a text about retranslation – since a retranslation is a new translation into the *same* target language.

rhythmical qualities of the original.”<sup>80</sup> Aristotle and Plato were prose writers, but this does not mean their works were lacking in rhythm, and the metric arrangement of their writing should, in Bruni’s view, be preserved in translation. Prose is content *and* form. In this respect, Bruni can be seen as anticipating Bassnett’s view that the translation of literary prose (novels, in her case) requires just as much careful attention to form on the part of the translator as the translation of poetry.<sup>81</sup>

By insisting on the stylistic brilliance of Aristotle and employing a translation strategy emphasizing his eloquence, Bruni was also re-classifying the Greek thinker as a “literary philosopher”<sup>82</sup> and consequently erasing the boundaries between philosophy and other genres. As his debate with Alfonso of Cartagena reveals, Bruni was actually tossing out the technical language established by the scholastic tradition and substituting it with the philosophical vocabulary of Cicero and Seneca whereby he, to quote Pym, granted Aristotle “a translational voice as a stylist, a person” and made philosophy use “the same words as other genres”.<sup>83</sup> Bruni’s *Ethics* is a retranslation that undermines a social institution by offering an interpretation of a canonical text that challenges that institution’s very self-understanding. As Venuti has observed, translations that are housed in social institutions (e.g. universities) are important for the “identity formation of the agents who function within it” as well as their “acquisition of values that constitute qualifications” and can therefore profoundly impact the functioning of that institution.<sup>84</sup> A new translation and thus new interpretation of one of a social institution’s core texts, a translation employing a different vocabulary and threatening to remove philosophy’s terminological specificity, represents an enormous threat to that social institution.

---

<sup>80</sup> Bruni 1987a, 220.

<sup>81</sup> Bassnett 1980/2002, 110–119. There are also conspicuous differences between Bruni’s and Bassnett’s points of view, however. Bruni focuses, among other things, on the preservation of the rhythmic qualities of the original, whereas Bassnett is interested in pointing out how a prose translator should not translate sentences “at face value”, but as “component units in a complex overall structure.” (p. 115). As regards prose, ‘form’ is not primarily meter to Bassnett, but concerns, for example, patterns of repetition, use of specific verbs, the way in which information is packaged within the sentence and how these features, located on a micro level, relate to larger wholes.

<sup>82</sup> I have borrowed this term from Parks 2004, 1. He does not, however, use it with reference to Aristotle.

<sup>83</sup> On Bruni’s debate with Alfonso, see Hankins 2003, 200–207. Pym unfortunately assumes that Bruni argued with Alfonso about a translation of Plato and not, as was the case, of Aristotle. Pym 2007, 41.

<sup>84</sup> Venuti 2004, 26.

By making Aristotle more immediately comprehensible, Bruni also made him accessible to readers beyond the ranks of university scholars. Indeed, another reason for retranslating the *Ethics* was that Bruni sought to reach an audience of not only specialists but also liberally educated readers more generally. The latter would, according to Hankins, not have time to pore over “an obscure text with the aid of glosses and questions”; they wanted a text that was similar in language and style to the classical Latin works they had read in the humanist schools; a text they could understand straight away.<sup>85</sup> Bruni’s translation, therefore, served a readership created by the humanist educators who had, as Hankins points out, established themselves as teachers in the Italian city-states of the late fourteenth century. Generally, retranslations occur because of the need to address a new audience.<sup>86</sup> However, while in *On the Correct Way to Translate* Bruni explicitly points out the medieval translator’s mingling of languages and general lack of style and terminologic precision as reasons for criticizing his translation (and retranslating Aristotle himself) and paints a picture of Aristotle and Plato as literary philosophers (thus re-categorizing the genre of their texts), he does not in his treatise openly state that his own translation was meant for a different audience than that of his medieval precursor.<sup>87</sup> Such an admission might also have proved problematic in that it would open up for a relativistic concept of translation in contrast with Bruni’s insistence on the correctness of his own version; a concept according to which different audiences might need and ask for different translations.

### Conclusion

At the beginning of this essay, I noted that the first attempts to include theories of intertextuality in modern translation studies, or to write about translation in the context of theories of intertextuality, appeared in the 1980s. In these early attempts, scholars put forward two arguments as to why it might prove useful to draw on theories of intertextuality in the study and practice of translation.

The first has to do with the status of translations. The fact that they are ‘derivative’ texts has often been considered an inherent flaw. However, since

---

<sup>85</sup> Hankins 2003, 197.

<sup>86</sup> Koskinen & Paloposki 2010a, 294.

<sup>87</sup> However, if Bruni does not state directly in his treatise that his translation was directed at a different readership, he does indicate as much in his 1436 preface to the *Politics*, quoted by Hankins 2003, 197. Here Bruni notes that his translation addressed his “fellow citizens” and “other who use Latin but are ignorant of Greek”; they were repelled by the medieval version and wished “to read the text of Aristotle, not *via* the enigmas and nonsense of absurd and false translations, but face to face as he wrote in Greek.”

all intertextual writing relies on previous sources to a greater or lesser extent, the derivative nature of translations is not a flaw; it is simply a condition of existence that translations share with many, if not all, other texts, depending on whether one applies a 'global' or 'local' theory of intertextuality. In fact, Genette's *Palimpsests* could be used to present such a status claim for translations, for indeed he does not use the term 'derivative' in a derogatory way.<sup>88</sup> The second argument has to do with providing a more realistic and comprehensive understanding of the task of the translator. As Bassnett has pointed out, the translator engages with many texts besides the original; s/he is a reader of multiple sources, not only the source text. Indeed, an ignorant translator is a deficient translator; without extensive reading, s/he will produce poor translations.

Bruni's *On the Correct Way to Translate* is evidently concerned not with the status of translations, but with the practical work of the translator. In summary, this treatise speaks to the question of intertextuality in translation as follows:

Translations respond to and dialogue with other translations. Bruni's own translation of the *Ethics* seeks to replace a previous Latin translation of Aristotle's text. The Italian humanist develops his ideas about what constitutes a correct translation by pointing out his predecessor's perceived mistakes and misinterpretations. In so doing, he constantly compares his translation not only to the source text (which is never quoted in Greek, for reasons noted above) but also to the 'old' translation. A measure of Bruni's own success is the defective character of the previous version.<sup>89</sup>

This is one of the ways in which the translation is linked to other texts in the target culture. Another link consists of the fact that, in Bruni's opinion, the translator should imitate the best and most well-regarded Latin writers. In the view of a scholar like Venuti, such a procedure would imply the translator creating an enormous disjunction between the source and target texts, "a proliferation of linguistic and cultural differences that are at once interpretive and interrogative."<sup>90</sup> When Venuti points out the difficulties in recreating foreign intertexts in translation and stresses that the substitution of foreign intertexts with domestic ones forces the two texts further apart rather than bringing them closer together, he criticizes the notion of dynamic equivalence, the idea that "a translation can produce for its reader an effect that is

---

<sup>88</sup> See for example Genette 1997, 5.

<sup>89</sup> For examples of these comparative dynamics – the 'deficient' previous translation serves as the background for measuring the achievements of the new one – in reviews of retranslations, see Koskinen & Paloposki 2015, 27.

<sup>90</sup> Venuti 2009, 157.

similar to or the same as the effect produced by the foreign text for the foreign-language reader.”<sup>91</sup> Bruni is not concerned as much with the effect that a translation might have on its audience as he is with the status of the original author. Whereas Venuti finds that domestic intertexts produce a disjunction between the source and target texts, Bruni believes that they contribute to making Aristotle, for example, an eminent Greek author, sound like an eminent Latin one in the translation.

As for relations between the source text and other texts, Bruni stresses that the translator must be an extremely well-read individual in order to successfully recognize the many ways in which source texts draw on the linguistic and literary resources of the source culture in which they were once produced. In Bruni’s view, the source text is not autonomous; it is related to other source culture texts, drawing its meaning from and incorporating them.

In Bruni’s discourse, the three sets of intertextual relations that Venuti describes as being involved in translation are not separate, they are interwoven. When positing that the relationship between the original and translation (the second set of intertextual relations involved in translation) ought to consist of granting Aristotle the same status in Latin as he enjoys in Greek, and that the translator should achieve this by imitating the best Latin writers, Bruni ties the translation closely to other target texts while also positioning it polemically vis-à-vis a previous translation (the third set of intertextual relations). According to Venuti, in the translator’s experience the interconnectedness of these three sets of intertextual relations reflects “the manifold losses and gains” the source text undergoes in translation.<sup>92</sup> Bruni would have stressed the gains.

---

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

### **Bibliography**

- Allen, Graham 2011, *Intertextuality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London & New York.
- Alvstad, Cecilia & Rosa, Alexandra Assis 2015, "Voice in Retranslation: An Overview and Some Trends", *Target* 27,1, 3–24.
- Baldassarri, Stefano 2003, *Umanesimo e traduzione da Petrarca a Manetti*, Cassino.
- Bassnett, Susan 2002 (1980), *Translation Studies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., London & New York.
- Bassnett, Susan 2007, "Influence and Intertextuality: A Reappraisal", *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 43,2, 134–146.
- Berman, Antoine 2009, *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, translated by Françoise Massardier-Kenney, Kent.
- Botley, Paul 2004, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, Desiderius Erasmus*, Cambridge.
- Bruni, Leonardo 1987a, *On the Correct Way to Translate*, translated by James Hankins, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, eds.: Gordon Griffiths et al., New York (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 46; *Renaissance Text Series* 10), 217–229.
- Bruni, Leonardo 1987b, "Preface to the Appearance of a New Translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*", translated by James Hankins, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, eds.: Gordon Griffiths et al., New York (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 46; *Renaissance Text Series* 10), 213–217.
- Bruni, Leonardo 1987c, "On the Study of Literature", translated by James Hankins, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, eds.: Gordon Griffiths et al., New York (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 46; *Renaissance Text Series* 10), 240–251.
- Bruni, Leonardo 1992, "The Right Way to Translate", translated by André Lefevere, *Translation/History/Culture*, ed.: André Lefevere, London & New York, 81–86.
- Bruni, Leonardo 1996, "De interpretatione recta / Sulla perfetta traduzione", translated by Paolo Viti, *Opere letterarie e politiche di Leonardo Bruni*, ed.: Paolo Viti, Torino, 147–193.
- Bruni, Leonardo 2003, "L'arte della traduzione", translated by Stefano Baldassarri, *Umanesimo e traduzione da Petrarca a Manetti*, ed.: Stefano Baldassarri, Cassino (*Dimore* 5), 193–218.
- Damrosch, David 2003, *What is World Literature?*, Princeton.
- Federici, Eleonora 2007, "The Translator's Intertextual Baggage," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 43, 2, 147–160.
- Genette, Gérard 1982, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris.

- Genette, Gérard 1997, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, translated by Channa Newman & Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln, NE.
- Hankins, James 1987, "The New Language", *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, eds.: Gordon Griffiths *et al.*, New York (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 46; *Renaissance Text Series* 10), 197–212.
- Hankins, James 2003, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, vol. 1: *Humanism*, Rome.
- Hermans, Theo 2003, "Translation, Equivalence and Intertextuality", *Wasafiri* 40, 39–41.
- Koskinen, Kaisa & Outi Paloposki 2010a, "Retranslation," *Handbook of Translation Studies*, 1, eds.: Yves Gambier & Luc van Doorslaer, Amsterdam, 294–298.
- Koskinen, Kaisa & Outi Paloposki 2010b, "Reprocessing Texts. The Fine Line Between Retranslating and Revising", *Across Languages and Cultures* 11,1, 29–49.
- Koskinen, Kaisa & Outi Paloposki 2015, "Anxieties of influence: The voice of the *first* translator in retranslation", *Target* 27,1, 25–39.
- Leppihalme, Ritva 1997, *Culture Bumps: An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*, Clevedon & Philadelphia.
- Liu, Jane Quian 2017, *Transcultural Lyricism: Translation, Intertextuality, and the Rise of Emotion in Modern Chinese Love Fiction, 1899-1925*, Leiden.
- Nergaard, Siri 1993, *La teoria della traduzione nella storia*, Milano.
- Nida, Eugene 1964, *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden.
- Nord, Christiane 1997, *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*, Manchester.
- Pade, Marianne 2017, "Popular government revisited: new texts on Greek political history and their influence in fifteenth-century Italy", *Neulateinisches Jahrbuch* 19, 313–338.
- Parks, Gerald 2004, "The Translation of Philosophical Texts", *Rivista internazionale di tecnica della traduzione / International Journal of Translation* 8, 1–10.
- Pfister, Manfred 1985, "Konzepte der Intertextualität", *Intertextualität, Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, eds.: Ulrich Broich & Manfred Pfister, Tübingen (*Konzepte der Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 35), 1–30.
- Pokorn, Nike K. 2005, *Challenging the Traditional Axioms: Translation into a non-mother tongue*, Amsterdam.
- Pym, Anthony 1998, *Method in Translation History*, Manchester.

- Pym, Anthony 2007, "Philosophy and Translation", *A Companion to Translation Studies*, eds.: Piotr Kuhiwczak & Karin Littau, Clevedon & Philadelphia (*Topics in translation* 34), 24–44.
- Sakellariou, Panagiotis 2015, "The Appropriation of the Concept of Intertextuality for Translation-Theoretic Purposes", *Translation Studies* 8, 1, 35–47.
- Toury, Gideon 2012, *Descriptive Translation Studies – and beyond*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia.
- Venuti, Lawrence 2004, "Retranslations: The Creation of Value", *Translation and Culture*, ed.: Katherine M. Faull (*Bucknell Review* 47,1), 25–38.
- Venuti, Lawrence 2008, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London & New York.
- Venuti, Lawrence 2009, "Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation", *Romance Studies* 27,3, 157–173.
- Von Koppenfels, Werner 1985, "Die literarische Übersetzung," *Intertextualität, Formen, Funktionen, anglistische Fallstudien*, eds.: Ulrich Broich & Manfred Pfister, Tübingen (*Konzepte der Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* 35), 137–158.
- Zanotti, Serenella 2011, "The Translator and the Author: Two of a Kind?", *The Translator as Author: Perspectives on Literary Translation*, eds.: Claudia Buffagni *et al.*, Berlin, 79–89.



# INTERTEXTUALITY AND EARLY MODERN TRANSLATION THEORY



By Massimiliano Morini

*Abstract: Before the late seventeenth century, no one produced a full-blown, coherent theory of translation in English – the Earl of Roscommon and John Dryden being commonly assumed to be the first true explorers in this uncharted territory. While recently there has been some recognition that an absence of explicit theoretical pronouncements does not entail a lack of theory, one of the reasons why modern commentators do not envisage the existence of early English translation theory may be that much of it is intertextual. This article draws on twentieth-century notions of intertextuality to trace the diffusion of continental theories of translation in early modern Britain.*

## 1. An intertextual theory of translation

It has become a commonplace of early modern English translation theory that there is, in fact, no such thing as a theory. From Flora Amos to Massimiliano Morini, scholars in the field have had to wrestle with the difficulty of piecing together a coherent set of values from a rather scattered series of theoretical pronouncements, and a very diverse body of translations. In her 1920 monograph on *Early Theories of Translation*, Amos concluded that the Tudor theoretician's work is “largely incidental [...] applicable only to the work in hand”, and that “There is no discussion in English corresponding to [Étienne Dolet's] *La manière de bien traduire d'un langue en au[l]tre*”;<sup>1</sup> while in his 2006 overview of the period, Morini opined that some kind of unified theory, derived from the Italian humanists, shines through the prefatory materials and can be gleaned from the practice.<sup>2</sup> But despite these differences in emphasis, it remains the task of the historian to paint a well-ordered picture of what is essentially a disorderly field.

More recently, Neil Rhodes has revisited the problem, pointing out that “there is nonetheless a considerable body of dialogue about the nature of

---

<sup>1</sup> Amos 1920, 98–99.

<sup>2</sup> Morini 2006, 13–24.

translation [...] produced in English during the *Renaissance* period”.<sup>3</sup> If the statement in itself is in keeping with former views, the use of the Bakhtinian term “dialogue” in this context is very interesting. It presupposes, again, that a theory can result from the efforts of various experts and practitioners working in the same field, more or less at the same time – referring, overtly or covertly, to each other’s work, or to precedents that may or may not be disclosed (or even consciously adopted). Rhodes immediately mentions the case of Bible translation, a field in which “that dialogue is intensely polemic” – then gets into the usual difficulties when trying to tease out similar results from its secular counterpart, whose practitioners “introduce their work with some consideration either of the competing claims of letter and spirit, or of the resources of English itself, or of the status of translation more generally”.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever the inconsistencies of early modern translators, there is a very valuable suggestion in Rhodes’ formulation on the intertextual nature of early modern translation theory. Even though, with the exception of Laurence Humphrey’s Latin *Interpretatio linguarum* (1559),<sup>5</sup> English translators were unable or unwilling to produce a single full-fledged treatise, the very repetitiveness of their pronouncements demonstrates that there is some theory to their practice. It is only by comparing their efforts intertextually – as well as by building intertextual bridges between them and their continental counterparts in what was, at the time, a tightly knit intellectual European community – that one can hope to understand what translation meant to people in Tudor England.

The following sections apply the modern notion, or rather notions, of intertextuality to early modern English translation theory. In this sense, the present study can be said to follow in the wake of recent articles by Panagiotis Sakellariou and Lawrence Venuti: Sakellariou, in particular, has explored the ways in which both Gérard Genette’s more restricted definition of the concept (texts as alluding to, and dependent on, other texts) and the post-structuralist, Kristevan (and, ultimately, Bakhtinian) sense of each and every text as an author-less ‘mosaic of quotations’, can be usefully employed in the service of theoretical translation studies.<sup>6</sup> Within the historical terms of this survey, this

---

<sup>3</sup> Rhodes 2013, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Rhodes 2013, 4.

<sup>5</sup> Humphrey’s Latin treatise, various passages of which are now available in English (Rhodes, Kendal & Wilson 2013, 263–294), is perhaps best considered as a contribution to an ongoing European debate: Humphrey, like other humanists who had written about translation, was mostly interested in Latin versions of Greek texts, though a short section on recent English translators (287–293) shows that he was aware of his fellow countrymen’s work, particularly when it entailed translating the classics.

<sup>6</sup> Sakellariou 2015, 36–39.

means that the texts at hand can be studied both in comparison with similar texts, and as single manifestations of general theoretical tendencies. These tendencies, in this particular period, are not made explicit in any single translation but may become evident if the translations, and other relevant texts, are seen as an interdependent intertextual constellation.

In practice, this means that in what follows, the prefaces and the translations – as well as, occasionally, the books that keep those together in one material unit – will be sifted through not only for cross-references, but also for instances of similar behaviour or for hidden references to more general ideological positions. As Lawrence Venuti puts it, when a text is repositioned in another culture a new set of intertextual relationships is created – with other translations, and with all cultural manifestations of the target culture: here, those intertextual relationships are analysed for what they reveal about translational ideologies in the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Inevitably, in the limited space of a scholarly article just a few exemplary connections and interdependencies can be explored: Hoby and Harington's translations from the Italian, Grimald's and Chapman's classical versions, and a brief history of sixteenth-century English *Aeneids* are used as case studies to test the potentialities of an intertextual theory of translation.

## 2. Intertextuality and four sixteenth-century *Aeneids*

The simplest, most straightforward approach to intertextuality has been present for many centuries in the intellectual debate – in practice, if not in name. One might call this the 'moderate', or perhaps 'watered down' approach:<sup>8</sup> it has to do with the awareness that texts, and especially literary ones, depend on and allude to other texts. As George Steiner wrote in an attempt to dismiss the structuralist and post-structuralist theories that will be mentioned in the next few sections, "intertextuality" in this sense can be seen as "a [...] piece of current jargon which signals the obvious truth that, in Western literature, most serious writing incorporates, cites, denies, refers to previous writing".<sup>9</sup>

If, as Neil Rhodes recognizes, the field of Renaissance biblical translation is particularly rife with affirmative and polemical references,<sup>10</sup> the most significant source of intertextual connections in Tudor secular literature is certainly Virgil's *Aeneid*, alongside its many English translations and

---

<sup>7</sup> Venuti 2009, 159.

<sup>8</sup> Haberer 2007, 6.

<sup>9</sup> Steiner 1989, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Rhodes 2013, 12–15; see also Bruce 1970.

refractions.<sup>11</sup> Even if one ignores all the dramatic renditions and manuscript versions, the great Latin poem was translated four times in the sixteenth century alone, with Gavin Douglas and Thomas Phaer/Thomas Twyne producing complete (Scottish and English) translations, and the Earl of Surrey and Richard Stanyhurst concentrating respectively on Books II and IV and I-IV.<sup>12</sup> Even aside from the sheer question of numbers, the interesting fact is that quite often these translators seem to be aware of each other's work.

The first translator to enter – or be entered – into the fray is actually from the fifteenth century. William Caxton had produced his own version of Virgil in 1490, but had done so by ‘Englishing’ a French one, the *Livre des Eneydes* (1483): this intermediary or indirect translation earned him the enraged spite of his closest successor, Gavin Douglas, Bishop of Dunkeld. In the prologue to his own Scottish *Eneados* (1513; published 1553), he reviles the printer for bringing out “ane buke of Inglyys gross, / Clepand it Virgill in Eneados, / Quhilk that he says of Franch he dyd translait”.<sup>13</sup> As evidenced by the wording of his formulation, Douglas takes issue both with the idea of translating Virgil from “Franch”, and with Caxton's chosen style. Caxton himself had voiced his preoccupation with finding a language which would be understood in all of England<sup>14</sup> – but for the later translator, his homely choices are evidently not good enough to reproduce the dignity of Latin verse.

These carpings may seem matter of fact to modern connoisseurs of translated literature, but it is worth pointing out that the position assumed by Gavin Douglas concerning the need to translate from the original language, and not an intermediary one, was relatively new in the field of secular translation. So far – particularly in Britain – the only books that had justified this form of intertextual debate were those in the biblical canon, or at most (but this had happened mainly in continental Europe) the great works of Latin and Greek philosophers. One is reminded, for instance, of Leonardo Bruni's fifteenth-century criticism of a former Aristotelian translator, whose knowledge of Greek was so inadequate that he produced a ‘barbarian’ translation.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Lefevere 2004 (originally published in 1982). It is worth mentioning, as Stuart Gillespie does in a more recent monograph, that out of 1500 English translations from about 100 ancient authors in the 1550–1800 period (i.e., 15 books per author on average), 103 versions are from Virgil; Gillespie 2011, 4.

<sup>12</sup> On the history of the British *Aeneid* see Hager 1982, Morini 2013, Brammall 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas 1950–1964, 7.

<sup>14</sup> Caxton 1890, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson 1997, 58–59. Of course, even though his efforts were, strictly speaking, literary, Virgil had long been regarded as a sort of philosopher – and in England his works were regarded as much more than mere poems or stories because of “their place in Renaissance pedagogy” (Kilgour 2015, 517).

All the other sixteenth-century translators of Virgil are as aware of the tradition they are working in as Gavin Douglas – or, for that matter, Leonardo Bruni. They do not always show this awareness by mentioning their predecessors, but even when they are completely silent, there are intertextual details in their work which speak louder than any prologues or prefaces. Surrey, for instance, often reproduces Douglas's wording in his versions of Books II and IV – at the same time substituting many of the Scottish and generally Anglo-Saxon words of the *Eneados* with Latinate diction that he must have thought more dignified. Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne (1558–1573) similarly show that they are following in the footsteps of both Surrey and Douglas, even when their hopping fourteeners would seem to distance them most from their predecessors' work. Finally, and most explicitly, Richard Stanyhurst prefaced his translation of Books I–IV with a rather suspect comment on his most commercially successful colleague. Those who will say that he has done nothing but follow Master Phaer, he says,

are altogether in a wrong box: considering that such woordes, as fit M. *Phaer*, may bee very vnapt for mee, which they would confesse, yf theyre skil were, so much as spare, in theese verses. Further more I stand so nicelie on my pantofles that way, as yf I could, yeet I would not renne on thee skore with M. *Phaer*, or ennie other, by borrowing his termes in so copious and fluent a language, as oure Englishe tongue is. And in good sooth although the gentleman hath translated *Virgil* in too English rythme with such surpassing excellencie, as a verie few (in my conceit) for pyekt and loftie woordes can burd hym, none, I am wel assured, ouergoe hym: yeet hee hath rather dabled, then defalckt oght of my paines, by reason that in conferring his translation with myne, I was forced, too weede owt from my verses such choise woordes, as were forestald by him.<sup>16</sup>

What he means by this very Anglo-Saxon apology is that Phaer's more Latinate diction would not have served his purpose in penning his own very Anglo-Saxon translation (which was also based on a rather curious prosodic theory). However, by protesting that not only did he not follow his fellow practitioner, but he actually tried *not* to follow him, Stanyhurst effectively admits that he had to confer his own translation with the most popular Virgil of his time. Even on those occasions when one of Phaer's words might have been acceptable for him, he was evidently compelled to stray from the beaten path in order to appear as his own man.

What all these cross-references and allusions amount to is a small intertextual history of the English *Aeneid* in the sixteenth-century – or, more

---

<sup>16</sup> Stanyhurst 1582, Aii<sup>v</sup>.

precisely, from 1485 to 1582. That such a history can be traced at all is in itself significant from the point of view of translation theory, because it shows that for such important works of literature, translators had to be aware of each other's work and/or to demonstrate that their version was at least as close to the original as any other. This, in turn, demonstrates an interest in reproducing the rhetorical texture of the source – at least from Gavin Douglas onwards. None of the sixteenth-century translators leaves out even a single line from Virgil's text – at a time when Harington could leave out hundreds of staves from his *Orlando furioso*, as we will see in Section 4.

Thus, in very general terms, these sixteenth-century *Aeneids* illustrate the slow penetration of continental ideas concerning the inviolability of the *inventio* and *dispositio* of the text (see Section 3 below). More specifically, Douglas's indignant comments betray an awareness that translating from an intermediary language is not always acceptable, although it was common practice, and held to be acceptable for lesser works; Surrey's invention of blank verse looks like a very early attempt at reproducing even the prosodic feel of the source poem (twenty years later, Phaer resorted to homely rhyming couplets), whereas Stanyhurst's strange Anglo-Saxon concoction represents one of the last purist stands in the old linguistic war between 'archaizers' and 'neologizers' (the latter won, as shown by Dryden's 1697 *Aeneis*). None of these theoretical points are made openly by the translators, who are sometimes surprisingly silent on the question of their art – but all of them can be construed by comparing their texts and looking at this aspect of the wider intertextual history of early modern translation.

### 3. Intertextuality and the rhetorical theory of translation

In *Introduction à l'architexte* (1979), Gerard Genette first proposed a distinction between 'intertextuality' and 'transtextuality'. The former is the traditional idea that texts quote and allude to each other; the latter is a more capacious concept, embracing all the ways in which texts depend on each other, so that each one can be seen as a reworking of existing texts – a unit which is able to produce meaning only in the context of an 'architectural' network. In the above section, all the ways in which the sixteenth-century translators refer and allude to each other can be seen as intertextual; while their relationship with the wider field of sixteenth-century translation, their awareness of what was allowed or forbidden in their specific field – and our ability to read that relationship and imagine their awareness – can only be defined as transtextual.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Genette 1992, 83–84.

A theoretical aspect which can only be investigated ‘transtextually’, or ‘architecturally’, is the diffusion in England of a theory of translation first elaborated in Italy by humanist scholars (and Greek-Latin translators) such as Coluccio Salutati (in a 1392 letter to Antonio Loschi) and Leonardo Bruni. The first modern translation historian to identify the tenets of this theory was probably Louis Kelly, who wrote in 1979 that after Bruni, “the weight of translation theory lay in a contrastive rhetoric”.<sup>18</sup> Massimiliano Morini further elaborated on this idea by specifying that this contrastive rhetoric involved the exact reproduction of the source text’s *inventio* and *dispositio*, and the artistic reworking of its *dispositio*.<sup>19</sup> Since, as Gordon Braden writes, one of the main and more ‘focused’ forces involved in the ‘Englishing’ of foreign writing was the insular humanistic movement,<sup>20</sup> one would expect to find traces of Bruni’s and Salutati’s theories in the writings of English humanists such as Thomas More and Roger Ascham.

As a matter of fact, these great intellectuals are generally interested in either the devotional or the didactic aspects of translation, rather than in any theoretical considerations.<sup>21</sup> However, it is in a couple of classical translations – and more specifically, in the translators’ paratexts – that some pronouncements crop up whose similarity with Italian ideas on translation is rather striking. The first of these is Nicholas Grimald’s version of Cicero’s *De officiis* (1556), where in his ‘Preface to the Reader’ the translator exhorts his fellow practitioners to behave as rhetoricians:

Howbeit looke, what rule the Rhetorician gives in precept, to bee observed of an Oratour, in telling of his tale: that it bee short, and withoute ydle wordes: that it be playn, and withoute derk sense: that it bee provable, and without any swarving from the trouth: the same rule should be used in examining, and iudging of translation. For it is not as brief, as the verie authors text requireth: whatso is added to his perfyte style, shall appeare superfluous, & to serve rather to the making of somme paraphrase, or commentarie. Therto, if it be uttered with ynkhorne termes, & not with usuall words: or if it be phrased with wrested, or farrefetched fourmes of speeche: not fine, but harsh, not easye, but harde, not naturall, but violent it shall seeme to bee.<sup>22</sup>

Various ‘transtextual’ strands are woven into the fabric of this definition. On the one hand, Grimald is positioning himself in the very English debate on

---

<sup>18</sup> Kelly 1979, 223.

<sup>19</sup> Morini 2006, 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Braden 2010.

<sup>21</sup> See More’s 1529 *Dialogue Concerning Heresies and Matters of Religion* (Robinson 1997, 76) and Ascham’s 1570 *Scholemaster* (Ascham 1967, 126).

<sup>22</sup> Grimald 1556, CCv<sup>v</sup>-CCvi<sup>r</sup>.

“inkhorn terms” that is, on the necessity – or otherwise – to coin new terms for the (paradoxically) newfangled words and notions found in classical texts. On the other, he is also situating his work in a long tradition which, through the Italian humanists, harks back to the universally-mentioned example of Cicero. There is a new sense of the sacredness of the source text that had so far been reserved for the Bible: the original is seen as “the truth”, and no “swarving” from it is to be allowed. A clear distinction is drawn between translation on one hand, and other practices like paraphrase or commentary on the other; and it is perfectly clear that in Grimald’s opinion, the translator must keep the author’s invention and disposition, while at the same time recreating (rhetorically) his “perfyte style”, or elocution.<sup>23</sup>

Near the close of the century, in 1598, a much more famous classical translator echoes Grimald’s pronouncements, with an even clearer reference to the humanist tenet of elocutionary recreation:

The worth of a skilfull and worthy translator, is to obserue the sentences, figures, and formes of speech, proposed in his author: his true sence and height, and to adorne them with figures and formes of oration fitted to the originall, in the same tongue to which they are translated.<sup>24</sup>

This is George Chapman speaking to the reader as a translator of Homer, and perfectly translating Bruni’s principles of rhetorical translation for late sixteenth-century England. Chapman’s insistence on the source “sentences, figures, and formes of speech” mirrors the Italian humanist’s provision, in *On the Correct Way to Translate* (*De interpretatione recta*, ca. 1426), that “one must carefully observe the cola, commata, and periods [...] figures of speech and figures of thought” of the original.<sup>25</sup> Also present in the fifteenth-century treatise is the idea that as regards elocution (“figures and formes of oration”), the translator can only re-create it by the idiomatic means of the target language (“in the same tongue to which they are translated”).

Of course, two transtextual references to the humanistic rhetorical theory of translation that we have just discussed are not enough to demonstrate that it was indeed dominant in sixteenth-century Britain – and in fact it is very doubtful that it was, as many translators continued to deal rather freely with their sources. But other trans- and intertextual connections demonstrate that

---

<sup>23</sup> On the centrality of elocution to the practices of imitation and translation, see Hermans 1992, 110.

<sup>24</sup> Chapman 1598, sig. A6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Robinson 1997, 59. “[...] necesse est per cola et commata et periodos incedere ac [...] duo [...] exornationum genera – unum, quo verba, alterum, quo sententiae colorantur,” Bruni 1996, 162.

this kind of attitude towards rhetorical translating, whether prevalent or not, was becoming more and more influential. On the one hand, there were the translators of such important classical works as Virgil's *Aeneid*, who were so interested in the Latin poet's invention and disposition that they chastised other translators for failing to follow them (Gavin Douglas), or so enamoured of his elocution that they tried to recreate the feel of his syntax and verse in English (Surrey). On the other, there were those who were working on lesser forms of writing, such as Italian chivalric poetry – who had to admit, as Harington did in his 1591 *Orlando Furioso*, that they had cut some parts “impertinent to us”.<sup>26</sup> The old freedom persisted in some of these cases, but the newly perceived sacredness of the source text, as proposed by some influential humanist translators and theorists, forced the freer translators to justify their alterations.

#### 4. Intertextuality and the ideologeme of classical superiority

In his useful guide to twentieth-century theories of *Intertextuality*, Graham Allen draws a distinction between structuralist and poststructuralist approaches to the concept. In Genette's and Riffaterre's structuralist systems, (literary) texts are seen as part of a wider (architectural) whole which contributes to define their significance. In Barthes's and Kristeva's more open-ended theories, texts do not just interrelate with other texts, but with all previous discourses, in such a thorough way that each of them must be seen not as “an individual, isolated object but, rather, a compilation of cultural textuality”.<sup>27</sup> Kristeva's work is particularly radical in this sense, and her notion of ‘ideologeme’ (derived from previous work by Bakhtin and Medvedev, and developed in her 1970 book *Le texte du roman*) is very useful in the context of the present study. In Allen's crystal-clear definition of Kristeva's complex arguments:

If we accept that words such as ‘natural’ or ‘justice’ are the subject of immense social conflicts and tensions, then their existence in a text will represent an *ideologeme*. One of the consequences of this way of describing texts is that we must give up the notion that texts present a unified meaning and begin to view them as the combination or compilation of sections of the social text. As such, texts have no unity or unified meaning on their own, they are thoroughly connected to on-going cultural and social processes.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Harington 1972, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Allen 2000, 36.

<sup>28</sup> Allen 2000, 37.

Thus, translations and translators' prefaces must not only be considered for their intertextual (or transtextual) connections to other translations and prefaces, but also for the place they occupy in a cultural whole which they somehow represent and reflect. In this sense, each sign in each translational work must be seen as determined by – or at the very least connected with – the rest of sixteenth-century British culture.

A good illustration of this is the way in which most sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British translations, both in their main texts and their paratextual apparatus, embody the Renaissance ideologeme of classical superiority. The centrality of classical culture in sixteenth-century England can hardly be overstated: Latin authors such as Virgil, Cicero and Ovid, in particular, formed the staple of education in the grammar schools of the realm.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, when translators worked on these authors, their practices were much more respectful and philological than when their sources were from contemporary continental Europe, as we saw in section two of this essay, and their prefatory materials were almost universally characterized by awe.

What is particularly interesting, here, is that the ideology of classical superiority was so strong that it carried over to non-classical translations. This is neatly shown in two of the most famous translations of the century, both from contemporary Italian authors: Thomas Hoby's *Courtyer* (1561) and Sir John Harington's *Orlando furioso in English heroical verse* (1591). In many ways, these two books and their authors are at opposite ends of the Renaissance translational spectrum: where Hoby is in awe of Baldassare Castiglione – and his version at times is so literal at the morpho-syntactic level that it makes for very hard reading – Harington produces a shortened version of Ariosto's verse which reads more like Harington's creation than Ariosto's. Notwithstanding this disparity, however, both practitioners are aware that their translations from Italian are, *per se*, inferior products if compared to versions of the classics, and that their work can only be defended (rather paradoxically) by referring to classical writers and classical translation.<sup>30</sup>

It may appear strange, from the vantage point of the contemporary reader, that Hoby and Harington felt it necessary to defend their versions of *Il cortegiano* and *Orlando furioso*: these, after all, were two of the greatest

---

<sup>29</sup> Hay 1988, 226 ff.

<sup>30</sup> The following analysis concerns exclusively paratextual material, both because it is in the prefatory materials and other paratextual elements that the ideologeme of 'classical superiority' is found in its clearest form, and because the translations themselves have been discussed widely and variously (On Hoby see, among others: Matthiessen 1931; Nocera Avila 1992; Morini 2006, 77–83. On Harington: Rich 1940; Javitch 1991; Morini 2004).

works of the early sixteenth century, surely already accepted in the transnational canon of early modern literature (though the term ‘canon’ is anachronistic). Indeed, the centrality of Castiglione and Ariosto to early modern European culture makes it even more noteworthy that the two translators devote substantial portions of their paratext to finding classical parallels for them.<sup>31</sup> More specifically, since the two books in question are respectively a great compendium of courtly manners and ideals and a chivalric poem of epic proportions, the translators seek to align their aims and style with the two most renowned Roman writers in prose and verse: Cicero for Hoby’s *Cortegiano*, and Virgil for Harington’s *Furioso*.

Hoby’s paratextual apparatus serves the purpose of demonstrating the greatness of the Italian book and its author – a sort of sustained *excusatio non petita* that betrays the translator’s uneasiness about his modern source text. The translation itself is supplemented by a dedicatory letter, a letter to Hoby penned by his master, the renowned Greek scholar John Cheke, and a laudatory poem by Thomas Sackville. All these materials have the function of ennobling the enterprise, as neatly shown by repeated mentions of the adjective ‘noble’ itself – eleven occurrences just in Hoby’s dedicatory letter.<sup>32</sup> Sackville’s poem picks up the term in order to remind its readers that Castiglione’s book is no mere handbook of manners, but a higher and more praiseworthy enterprise – the instructional analogue of aristocratic architecture:

A rarer worke and richer far in worth,  
Castilios hand presented here to thee. [...]  
The prince he raiseth huge and mightie walles,  
Castilio frames a wight of noble fame:<sup>33</sup>

Here ‘noble’ has strong social connotations, inspired by the setting of the book at the Montefeltro court in Urbino. In Hoby’s dedicatory letter, by contrast, it acquires moral and intellectual overtones, and an explicit link with the great men and writers of classical times. Hoby takes advantage of the dialogic form of Castiglione’s treatise – the same employed by Cicero for many of his works – to draw a parallel between the Italian and the Latin writer:

---

<sup>31</sup> Thus demonstrating a specialised form of what Neil Rhodes (2011) terms “Status anxiety”.

<sup>32</sup> On Hoby’s probable reasons for undertaking the translation at all – as reflected in the paratext – see Partridge 2007. See also Coldiron 2015 for the partial inclusion of Hoby’s paratextual materials in a later trilingual edition.

<sup>33</sup> Hoby 1974, 1.

Were it not that the ancientnes of time, the degree of a Consul, and the eloquence of Latin stile in these our dayes bear a great stroke, I know not wither in the invention and disposition of the matter, as Castilio hath folowed Cicero, and applyed to his purpose sundrie examples and pithie sentences out of him, so he may in feat conveyance and like trade of wryting, be compared to him: But wel I wot, for renowme among the Italians, he is not inferiour to him.<sup>34</sup>

To fully appreciate the value of this parallel, it is worth mentioning that the *Aeneid* translators never feel the need to extol the virtues of their writer – because they are so well known as to need no extolling. Here, Castiglione’s greatness is not so much stated as demonstrated by association with a great Latin precedent (and a few lines further, Hoby adds a Greek reference when he writes that “many most excellent wittes in this Realme have made no lesse of this booke, than the Great Alexander did of Homer”). Even more interestingly, what follows is a plea for the Englishing of all Latin and Greek masterpieces – which feels perfectly at home here until one realizes that Hoby is not presenting a translation of a classical work.

A similar procedure is followed by Harington when he tries to justify his *Orlando furioso* by claiming that Ariosto has an impeccable Latin pedigree. In characteristically contradictory fashion, the courtier-translator claims that the Italian poem is both important enough to justify an English version, and not so important as to prompt him to “observe his phrase so strictly as an interpreter” – a euphemism for his cutting around 800 staves of the original.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, for the benefit of those who will object to his choice of these “Italian toyes” as translation material,<sup>36</sup> Harington insists that the model for the *Furioso* is really Virgil’s *Aeneid*:

I will make choise of some other Poeme that is allowed and approved by all men and a little compare them together, and what worke can serve this turne so fitly as *Virgils Aeneados*, whom above all other it seemeth my authour doth follow as appears both by his beginning and ending.<sup>37</sup>

Some similarities in “his beginning and ending” seem scant evidence for the parallel – and yet Harington claims throughout that Ariosto is a modern Virgil. For one thing, he peppers the translation with notes that detail all the allusions to classical literature in the Italian poem – the vast majority of which, he says, are to the *Aeneid*. And in the introduction, he closes an

---

<sup>34</sup> Hoby 1974, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Harington 1972, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Harington 1972, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Harington 1972, 14–15.

argument on whether poetic translators should be called poets or versifiers by mentioning the most famous translators of Virgil and Ovid of his era:

least of all do I purpose to bestow any long time to argue [...] whether Master *Faire* translating Virgil, Master *Golding* translating *Ovids* Metamorphosis, and my selfe in this worke that you see be any more than versifiers.<sup>38</sup>

Harington is here asking a rhetorical question rather than really defending the position of poetic translators – but what is of interest is that in order to defend his own practice, he aligns it with the work of two classical translators who have produced English versions of the Latin poems most beloved of Renaissance culture. Once again, the ideologeme of classical superiority is demonstrated by someone trying to justify the translation of modern works, and finding no better strategy than establishing a parallel with some hallowed Latin text.

Again, it is worth pointing out that this ideologeme is pervasive in sixteenth-century culture – reflected not only in translations of classical and modern works (and those writing about them), but also in educational treatises, private correspondence, and more generally all the textual and paratextual expressions of British culture. When Roger Ascham wrote a manual for the elite *Schoolmaster* of his time, for instance, he proposed Cicero, Terence, Plautus, Caesar and Titus Livius as staple authors. The exiled Laurence Humphrey gave ‘prime place’ amongst secular writers to ‘Cicero in Latin prose, Virgil in hexameter verse’, and when extolling the virtues of his countrymen who had distinguished themselves as translators, he chose Surrey as his ‘prime example’ of excellence, even calling him ‘a veritable Cicero and Virgil in his own language’.<sup>39</sup> More frivolously, but perhaps even more significantly, John Harington chose a frontispiece for his luxurious edition of the *Orlando furioso* that sums up both his character and his literary aspirations: the oval that contains his bust is much bigger than the one framing Ariosto’s head, and is being gazed at by the translator’s dog; both figures are enclosed within a bigger temple-like structure adorned with columns, classical statues, and a quotation from Horace. Though works like these would come to shape the British literature of the future, everything in them looks to the past for guidance and inspiration.

---

<sup>38</sup> Harington 1972, 14.

<sup>39</sup> His phrasing, in Gordon Kendal’s translation, makes one suspect that he had not actually seen Surrey’s efforts: “He is said to have translated [*convertisse*] a good part of Virgil’s *Aeneid* into English verse and measures, to the praise and admiration of all who have seen it,” Rhodes, Kendal & Wilson 2013, 283 and 288.

## 5. Conclusion

In their general lines, if not in their terminology, sections two and three above would probably have been understandable to sixteenth-century English – or, for that matter, European – intellectuals. For Tudor readers, the idea that all texts are dependent on other texts would have been made materially evident by the wealth of marginal notes they would find in their reading material – most of these, as seen in Harington’s version of Ariosto, being dedicated to tracing classical textual *loci* as precedents for the text at hand. The readers themselves, in fact, would fill those texts with further *marginalia*, whose content would sometimes be personal and often contain references to other texts. Classical allusions would be deemed to be particularly important: a reader of Spenser, for instance, would probably think it worthwhile to note the places in which the English author had followed Virgil.<sup>40</sup>

The matter in section four, on the other hand, would probably have been harder to grasp, both in practical and ideological terms. On the one hand, understanding a concept like ‘ideologeme’ requires a high degree of cultural relativism: and while that quality was arguably emerging in the European Renaissance (one need only think of Montaigne’s *Essais*), it would have been very difficult for sixteenth-century Englishmen to cultivate the detachment necessary for a thorough cultural self-examination. Furthermore, even if someone had been capable of isolating them, such ideologemes as that of ‘classical superiority’ would have been meaningless to early modern Englishmen and Englishwomen: the idea that Virgil and Cicero were superior to Ariosto and Castiglione would have been so obvious as to deserve no analysis at all.

We must, however, shed light on one further intertextual aspect of the discussion before closing the argument – a rhetorical device that most Renaissance writers would have been able to identify. The three sections above are not just isolated examples of how intertextual connections can be used to understand the work of early modern translators: the sections themselves, in fact, are intertextual. The scattered evidence for the diffusion of a humanist, rhetorical theory of translation becomes more convincing when combined with the operation of those humanistic principles in classical translations such as the *Aeneids* of the sixteenth century. The reason why classical translations tended to elicit a closer adherence to those principles becomes more evident when one looks at what the ‘modern’ translators have to say about classical books. Moreover, the fact that some of those modern translators feel they have to justify their freer practices – by saying that their

---

<sup>40</sup> See Kallendorf 2007, “Marginalia and the Rise of Early Modern Subjectivity”, 121–2.

work is like, yet also unlike, that of their ‘classical’ colleagues – shows that some form of rhetorical adherence was now expected of all ‘Englishers’.

Of course, these concerns do not exhaust the matter of early modern translation theory: in order to do that, much more would have to be said on genres, gender, the history and prestige of the English language, and many topics that cannot even be briefly touched upon within the space of an academic article. Those who have tried to consider all these topics together, however, have painted a picture of a fairly coherent (translational) culture, creating the impression that for all its cultural and religious wars, the British sixteenth century was a period of largely shared ideologies, discourses and practices.<sup>41</sup> Now, with a great mass of primary and secondary material at their disposal, the next step for the historians of early modern translation may be the creation of a fully intertextual account of their field of study.

---

<sup>41</sup> See Matthiessen 1931; Lindeman 1981; Morini 2006; Braden, Cummings and Gillespie 2010; Rhodes 2013.

**Bibliography**

- Allen, Graham 2000, *Intertextuality*, London.
- Amos, Flora Ross 1920, *Early Theories of Translation*, New York.
- Ascham, Roger 1967, *The Schoolmaster*, ed.: Lawrence V. Ryan, Ithaca.
- Braden, Gordon 2010, “An Overview”, *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English: Volume 2, 1550-1660*, eds.: Gordon Braden, Robert Cummings and Stuart Gillespie, Oxford, 3–11.
- Braden, Gordon, Robert Cummings & Stuart Gillespie (eds.) 2010, *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English: Volume 2, 1550-1660*, Oxford.
- Brammall, Sheldon 2015, *The English Aeneid: Translations of Virgil, 1555-1646*, Edinburgh.
- Bruce, Frederick F. 1970, *The English Bible: A History of Translations from the Earliest English Versions to the New English Bible*, London.
- Bruni, Leonardo 1996, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, ed.: Paolo Viti, Torino.
- Caxton, William 1890, *Caxton's Eneydos, 1490, English from the French Livre des Eneydes, 1483*, eds.: W.T. Culley & F.J. Furnivall, London.
- Chapman, George 1598, *Seaven Bookes of the Iliades of Homere, Prince of Poets, Translated according to the Greeke [...]*, London.
- Coldiron, Anne 2015, “Form[e]s of transnationhood: the case of John Wolfe's trilingual *Courtier*”, *Renaissance Studies* 29,1 (special issue on *Translation and print culture in early modern Europe*, ed.: B. Hosington), 103–24.
- Douglas, Gavin 1950–1964, *Virgil's Aeneid Translated into Scottish Verse by Gavin Douglas*, ed.: David F. C. Coldwell, Edinburgh.
- Genette, Gerard 1992, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans.: Jane E. Lewin, Berkeley, CA.
- Gillespie, Stuart 2011, *English Translation and Classical Reception: Towards a New Literary History*, Oxford.
- Grimald, Nicholas 1556, *Marcus Tullius Ciceroes thre bokes of duties, to Marcus his sonne, turned oute of latine into english [...]*, London.
- Haberer, Adolphe 2007, “Intertextuality in Theory and Practice”, *Literatūra* 49,5, 54–67.
- Hager, Alan 1982, “British Virgil: Four Renaissance disguises of the Laocoön passage of book 2 of the ‘Aeneid’”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 22,1, 21–38.
- Harington, John 1972, *Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso: Translated into English Heroical Verse*, ed.: Robert McNulty, Oxford.
- Hay, Denis 1988, *Renaissance Essays*, London.

- Hermans, Theo 1992, "Renaissance Translation between Literalism and Imitation", *Geschichte, System, Literarische Übersetzung / Histories, Systems, Literary Translations*, ed: Harald Kittel, Berlin, 95–116.
- Hoby, Thomas 1974, *The Book of the Courtier translated by Sir Thomas Hoby*, ed.: J.H. Whitfield, London.
- Javitch, Daniel 1991, *Proclaiming a Classic: The Canonization of Orlando Furioso*, Princeton.
- Kallendorf, Craig 2007, *The Virgilian Tradition: Book History and the History of Reading in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot.
- Kelly, Louis G. 1979, *The True Interpreter: A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West*, Oxford.
- Kilgour, Maggie 2015, "Virgil and Ovid", *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume 2: 1558-1660*, eds: Patrick Cheney and Philip Hardie, Oxford, 517–538.
- Lefevere, André 2004, "Mother Courage's cucumbers: Text, system and refraction in a theory of literature", *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed.: Lawrence Venuti, New York, 239–55.
- Lindeman, Yehudi 1981, "Translation in the Renaissance: A Context and a Map", *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 8,2, 204–216.
- Matthiessen, Francis O. 1931, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art*, Cambridge (MA).
- Morini, Massimiliano 2004, "Sir John Harington and the Poetics of Tudor Translation", *Travels and Translations in the Sixteenth Century*, ed.: Mike Pincombe, Aldershot, 120–136.
- Morini, Massimiliano 2006, *Tudor Translation in Theory and Practice*, Aldershot.
- Morini, Massimiliano 2013, "Virgil in Tudor Dress: In Search of a Noble Vernacular", *Neophilologus* 97,3, 591–610.
- Nocera Avila, Carmela 1992, *Tradurre il Cortegiano: The Courtyer di Sir Thomas Hoby*, Bari.
- Partridge, Mary 2007, "Thomas Hoby's English Translation of Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*", *The Historical Journal* 50,4, 769–86.
- Rich, Townsend 1940, *Harington and Ariosto: A Study in Elizabethan Verse Translation*, New Haven, CT.
- Rhodes, Neil 2011, "Status anxiety and English Renaissance translation", *Renaissance Paratexts*, eds.: Helen Smith & Louise Wilson, Cambridge, 107–120.
- Rhodes, Neil 2013, "Introduction", *English Renaissance Translation Theory*, eds.: Neil Rhodes, Gordon Kendal & Louise Wilson, London (*MHRA Tudor & Stuart Translations* 9), 1–67.

ISSUES IN TRANSLATION

*Renaissanceforum* 14 • 2018 • [www.renaissanceforum.dk](http://www.renaissanceforum.dk)

*Massimiliano Morini: Intertextuality and Early Modern Translation Theory*

---

- Rhodes, Neil, Gordon Kendal & Louise Wilson (eds.) 2013, *English Renaissance Translation Theory*, London (*MHRA Tudor & Stuart Tranlations* 9).
- Robinson, Douglas (ed.) 1997, *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, Manchester.
- Sakellariou, Panagiotis 2015, “The appropriation of the concept of intertextuality for translation-theoretic purposes”, *Translation Studies* 8,1, 35–47.
- Stanyhurst, Richard 1582, *The First Foure Bookes of Virgil His Aeneis Translated into English heroical verse [...]*, London.
- Steiner, George 1989, *Real Presences*, London.
- Venuti, Lawrence 2009, “Translation, Intertextuality, Interpretation”, *Romance Studies* 27,3, 157–173.

# FROM VALLA TO NIDA:

## Biblical translation in the Renaissance and the twentieth century



By Annet den Haan

*Abstract: In the twentieth century, Eugene Nida presented his translation theory as a new direction in the history of biblical translation. His work became very influential. This article investigates to what degree his theory differed from traditional theory on biblical translation, comparing it with the Renaissance debate. Although Nida worked in a very different context, giving his theory scientific legitimacy by grounding it in modern theories of language and communication, his assumptions about theology and translatability are similar to those of Renaissance authors like Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457).*

### Introduction

When Eugene Nida (1914–2011) wrote *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), he presented it as a new direction in biblical translation: from now on, translating the Bible would be a scientific discipline.<sup>1</sup> He was aware that there had already been a long tradition of biblical translation, but he considered his own work completely different in nature. His translation theory became very influential: it helped shape the field of translation studies and current discussions of biblical translation theory are still building on it.<sup>2</sup> Although Nida and other twentieth-century theorists did not look back in time, they were concerned with the same questions and problems as earlier authors who reflected on translation. The aim of this paper is to discover what modern and older views on biblical translation have in common by comparing biblical translation theory across periods. Specifically, I compare theory written in the Renaissance with that written in the twentieth century. In the Renaissance, debates on biblical translation were especially intense because of the new approaches adopted by the humanists, and because of the Reformation. In the twentieth century, biblical translation theory took flight when it was embedded in new theories of language and communication. Yet I shall argue that twentieth-century biblical translation theory has much in common with

---

<sup>1</sup> Nida 1964. This work is discussed below, together with Nida & Taber 1969 (p. 106ff.).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of Nida's reception, see Pattemore 2007.

that of the Renaissance. Authors in both periods discussed the same questions and arguments; it was simply that their emphasis differed because of contextual factors and the nature of theory.

For convenience's sake, I use the word 'theory' indiscriminately for reflections on methodology and for explanatory frameworks. This includes prescriptive and descriptive theory. It is often difficult to distinguish between the two, because authors tend to defend their own practice by combining descriptive and prescriptive elements: they describe how translation works (descriptive) in order to draw up rules for what a good translation is (prescriptive). This holds true for almost all pre-modern translation theory. In the modern period, there has been a general tendency to move from prescriptive to descriptive theory in the field of translation – and in the humanities at large.<sup>3</sup> But even in the twentieth century, biblical translation was not completely descriptive.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars have applied insights from modern translation studies to biblical translations from earlier periods before, but in these cases they combine descriptive modern theory with historical translation practice. They do not compare any theory of biblical translation across periods.<sup>5</sup> Historical overviews of translation theory tend to summarize all developments before the modern era under one heading (such as 'traditional theory'),<sup>6</sup> limit themselves to the pre-modern period,<sup>7</sup> or leave out the historical and intellectual context of the authors they discuss.<sup>8</sup> With regard to biblical translation, in particular, historians who concentrate on this genre tend to treat the modern period as an afterthought.<sup>9</sup> As a result, the similarities between modern and Renaissance biblical translation theories have not yet been explored.

In this essay, in which I base my comparison of the two periods on a small sample of authors meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, I intend to correct this situation. For the Renaissance, I limit myself to authors who wrote in Latin between 1450 and 1530, whom I consider as representative for the debate. These are Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), and Petrus Sutor (Pierre Cousturier, 1475–1537). For the modern period, my case study is Nida, because of his influence

---

<sup>3</sup> Bod 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Pattemore 2007, 217–20.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Barr 1979; van der Louw 2007; Olofsson 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Steiner 1975; Snell-Hornby 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Norton 1981; 1984; Rener 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly 1979.

<sup>9</sup> For example in the works of Werner Schwarz and Anthony Pym, which are discussed below.

on twentieth-century translation studies. My article will introduce a framework as a tool for comparing various positions in the age-long debate on biblical translation, discuss each position, illustrating it with an example from the Renaissance, and then use the same framework to describe Nida's position. Finally, I will explore the contextual factors that influenced the debate on biblical translation in the Renaissance and the twentieth century.

### **The framework**

Over the ages, authors discussing biblical translation have put forward various principles or approaches, depending on their beliefs about the inspiration of the source text, the status of the translation, the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the translation process, or the tradition of the church, which sanctions translations by using them. In order to compare these approaches over time, scholars have developed frameworks for organizing and classifying biblical translation theory. I will discuss two here, before introducing my own.

Werner Schwarz, who wrote several studies on the history of biblical translation theory, concentrated on two historical periods when discussions about Bible translation were at their fiercest: the fourth to fifth centuries CE and the early sixteenth century.<sup>10</sup> He distinguished three principles. The first is that of inspiration, meaning that not only the source text, but also the translation of the Bible is divinely inspired. Representatives of this principle are Augustine and Luther. The second is that of philology, meaning that the Bible is to be translated in the same way as any other text. The success of the translation depends on the translator's linguistic skill, not on his holiness or orthodoxy. Representatives of this tradition are Jerome and Erasmus. The third principle is that of traditionalism. Its defenders believe that the Bible has been translated perfectly once and for all and that this one translation is sanctioned by tradition. According to them, there is no need to make a new translation.

More recently, Anthony Pym, working in the field of historical descriptive translation studies, proposed a framework that dichotomized representational and non-representational epistemologies of Bible translating, in which 'epistemology [is] understood [...] as a mode of construing knowledge from a text.'<sup>11</sup> Representationalists believe that the language of the Bible refers to something outside of the text, which can be captured and communicated in a translation. There is nothing sacred about the words of the Bible; it is their meaning that is inspired and supernatural. This meaning can be translated

---

<sup>10</sup> Schwarz 1955; 1963; 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Pym 2007, 195.

according to linguistic principles. Non-representationalists, by contrast, believe that the Bible is exceptional, that its words and meaning are related in a supernatural way, and that receptors have access to the meaning of the text through revelation. For non-representationalists, not only the message and meaning of the text are sacred, but also the very words and language in which it is written. This sacredness can be passed on to the translation of the text through an act of inspired translation. As a result, the translation is itself inspired and its sacredness is not limited to the meaning of the text, but extends to its language, just as in the case of the source text.

In my opinion, the frameworks proposed by Schwarz and Pym are helpful, but insufficient for comparing authors and tracing developments over time. There are two problems. The first is that the categories are not very precise. For example, in Pym’s framework Augustine fits both the representational and non-representational profile.<sup>12</sup> In Schwarz’s, the difference between the inspirational and traditional principles is unclear: a translation can be believed to be sacred because it was inspired when it was made (inspiration), or because the Holy Spirit dwells in the Church who sanctioned it (tradition). The result is the same: in both cases, the translation cannot be questioned or corrected. The second, more important problem is that the frameworks proposed by Schwarz and Pym do not distinguish between ideas about the supernatural status of the Bible and ideas about translatability. Two authors may agree that translating the Bible is a matter of philology, not inspiration, but still hold very different opinions about the translatability of the source text, as I will demonstrate below.

As a solution, I propose a grid with two axes (Figure 1):

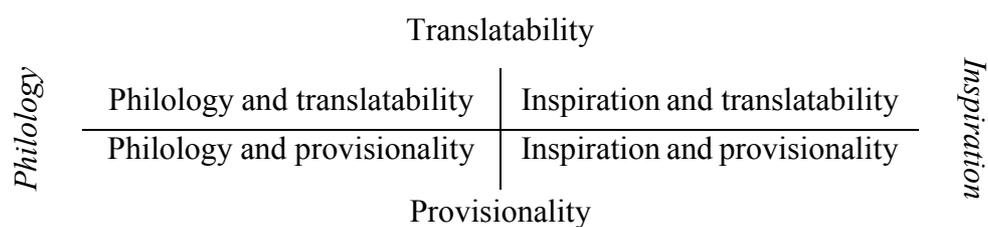


Figure 1: The positions in the debate

The vertical axis represents beliefs about translatability. This ranges from the possibility of replacing the original altogether to provisionality of translation.<sup>13</sup> The horizontal axis represents beliefs about the role of

---

<sup>12</sup> Pym 2007, 205–6.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Botley’s discussion of the various ‘attitudes towards the original text’ that existed in the Renaissance. Botley distinguishes three categories: translations that replace the

inspiration in the translation process. This axis ranges from ‘philology’ to ‘inspiration’. On the philological end of the spectrum, we find authors who approach biblical translation as they would the translation of any text – the same problems and difficulties apply. This view goes back to Jerome (347–420), who in his preface to his Pentateuch famously remarked that ‘it is one thing to be a prophet, and another to be a translator.’<sup>14</sup> On the inspirational end, biblical translation is fundamentally different from translating other texts. The translator needs to be inspired (or holy, or orthodox), or the translation needs to be sanctioned by tradition. If this view is combined with optimism about translatability, the result is a belief in the existence of a perfect translation. This view is found in the work of Philo of Alexandria (20 BC – 50 AD), who described the translation process of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. According to Philo, the translators worked under the guidance of the Spirit of God, producing a perfect translation in the process, where each Greek word fitted each Chaldean (Hebrew) word perfectly in spite of the differences between the languages. The translation was so faithful that the Greek could be translated back into the original by someone schooled in both languages. Philo draws a parallel with geometry and logic, where concepts are universal and unchangeable.<sup>15</sup>

The grid with two axes makes it possible to distinguish between views that are apparently similar, but based on different presuppositions. For example, two authors can agree that it is impossible to render the text of the Bible accurately in translation (provisionality), but for different reasons. One may believe it is impossible for philological reasons, such as the incommensurability of languages (provisionality and philology), whereas the other may believe that translation is impossible because the very words in the original language are inspired (provisionality and inspiration).

### **Philology and translatability: Valla**

The Renaissance debate on biblical translation started when Italian humanists began to apply their new philological methods to the common Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate.<sup>16</sup> It had already been corrected by monastic scholars in the late Middle Ages, but they had limited themselves to

---

original, translations that compete with the original, and translations that supplement the original. Botley 2004, 164–77.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Aliud est enim esse vatem; aliud est esse interpretem’, Fischer and Weber (1969), vol. 1, 3. There, however, the text reads *vates*.

<sup>15</sup> Philo, *Vita Mosis* II, 37–40.

<sup>16</sup> In the fifteenth century, the Vulgate was not yet referred to by that name, but I use it here for convenience’s sake.

eliminating textual corruptions. The Italian humanists questioned the accuracy and style of the translation itself.<sup>17</sup> In their reflections on biblical translation, they were optimistic about translatability, and they believed that the Bible should be approached as any other literary text.

The most important example of an author who held this view is Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457), who wrote a series of annotations (often corrections) to the Latin New Testament in the 1450s.<sup>18</sup> This work was criticized by Poggio Bracciolini, who accused Valla of meddling with Sacred Scripture. Valla defended himself as follows:

Itaque ne multus sim, siquid emendo non Scripturam Sacram emendo, sed illius interpretationem, neque in eam contumeliosus sum, sed pius potius, nec aliud facio nisi quod melius quam prior interpretes transfero, ut mea translatio sit si vera fuerit appellanda Sancta Scriptura, non illius. Etsi proprie Scriptura Sancta sit ea que Sancti ipsi vel Hebraice vel Grece scripserunt; nam Latinum nihil tale est.<sup>19</sup>

So in short, if I revise anything I do not revise Sacred Scripture, but its translation, and this does not make me insolent, but rather dutiful, and the only thing I do is translate better than the first translator, so that if it is accurate, my translation should be called Sacred Scripture, not his. Nevertheless, Sacred Scripture is really what the saints wrote in Hebrew and Greek, for the Latin is nothing of the sort.

Valla makes the point that the translation is not sacred – it is the original that is inspired and should be referred to as Sacred Scripture. Although he does not explicitly enter into the question of translatability in this passage, he is implicitly optimistic about it: he believes he can do a better job than the earlier translator (‘melius quam prior interpretes transfero’) and that his translation can be accurate (‘si vera fuerit’). Valla’s aim was to make the Latin text understandable for those who could not read Greek. The literal translation method of the Vulgate had led to all kinds of misunderstandings in exegesis,

---

<sup>17</sup> For an overview of scholars who corrected the text of the Vulgate in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, see Linde 2012. The biblical scholarship of Italian humanists is discussed in Hamilton 1996 and Monfasani 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Valla’s annotations were discovered by Erasmus in 1504 and published in 1505. Erasmus’ edition of Valla’s work was reprinted in the twentieth century in Valla’s *Opera omnia* (Valla 1962). An earlier redaction of Valla’s notes, probably written in the 1440s, was published by Perosa (Valla 1970). For Valla’s biblical scholarship, see Fois 1969; di Napoli 1971; Camporeale 1972, and more recently Celenza 1994; Cortesi 1997; Celenza 2012; den Haan 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Valla, *Antidotum primum* I, 136 (Valla 1978). All translations of Latin quotations are my own.

which he meant to remedy.<sup>20</sup> The implication is that it should be possible to read the Latin as a replacement of the source text.

Other fifteenth-century humanists held roughly the same position as Valla. Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459) and Aurelio Lippi Brandolini (c. 1454–1497) produced new Latin versions of parts of the Bible. Manetti reflected on his translation of the Psalter in a treatise, *Apologeticus* (1458), and Brandolini defended his Old Testament paraphrase in a preface.<sup>21</sup> In these texts, they treated biblical translation as any other genre, emphasizing the importance of Latin elegance.<sup>22</sup>

### Provisionality: Erasmus

By the early sixteenth century, humanism had become more influential in the European universities, and humanists concerned themselves more and more with biblical scholarship. This resulted in revisions of the Vulgate such as Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum* (1516), the Complutensian Polyglot (1522), and the revised Vulgate issued by Henri Estienne (1528). But at the same time, authors in this period were less optimistic about translatability than the fifteenth-century humanists. They argued that no translation, however skilfully made, can convey the full meaning of the original text. For this reason, readers of the Bible cannot rely on translations made by others, but need direct access to the sources. One author who promoted reading the Bible in the original languages was Mattheus Adrianus, in an *Oratio* delivered in 1519 and printed in Wittenberg in 1520:

[...] ac mysterium saepenumero in syllabis latet, ac literis et punctis in ipsis linguae idiomatibus seu proprietatibus. Quid hic faciet theologus linguarum ignarus? Nimirum, aut fide hallucinetur oportet, aut alieno duci se paciatur ingenio.<sup>23</sup>

[...] and oftentimes the mystery lies hidden in the syllables, and letters and points, in the very idioms and peculiarities of the language. What

---

<sup>20</sup> Valla wrote this in his preface to the *Annotationes*, of which two versions survive. They were edited by Perosa together with the text of the annotations (Valla 1970). They are discussed and translated into English by Celenza (2012).

<sup>21</sup> For the preface to Brandolini's text, see Rummel 1995a. Manetti's text was edited by Alfonso de Petris (Manetti 1981); a new Latin edition with facing English translation was published recently (Manetti 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Whereas Rummel (1995a) discusses Brandolini's preface as typical of the humanist philological approach to Scripture, Monfasani believes that Brandolini merely praises rhetoric in general, without making an argument about Scripture specifically (Monfasani 2008, 37). For Manetti's translation theory, see De Petris 1975; Botley 2004; De Petris 2008, and the introduction to Manetti 2016.

<sup>23</sup> This text has been edited and discussed by De Vocht 1951, 533–43 (540).

is a theologian who is ignorant of languages to do then? Surely, he must wander about in blind faith, or suffer himself to be led by the abilities of another.

Adrianus' *Oratio* was part of a broader debate on language studies. Other authors who promoted the study of the biblical languages were Alard of Amsterdam, Tranquillus Andronicus, and Mosellanus.<sup>24</sup>

The incommensurability of languages was only one reason for studying the Bible in the original, however; another was the special nature of the biblical message, whose words in the original language are too full of meaning to be translated. For example, Cardinal Ximenes (Jiménes de Cisneros, 1436–1517), in his prologue to the Complutensian Polyglot, wrote that all languages have their own peculiarities of expression, especially the language spoken by Christ. For this reason, no translation can render the full meaning of Sacred Scripture.<sup>25</sup> For Ximenes, biblical translation is always provisional, both for philological reasons and because of the inspiration of the sacred text.

The most important author on biblical translation in this period was Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), who published his own Greek New Testament with Latin translation in 1516.<sup>26</sup> Erasmus believed that no translation of the Bible could be perfect and final. In his translations of pagan classical texts, he was more confident about translatability, but even there, he was aware of the limitations of translation, and considered it an intermediate tool, necessary only until enough readers had mastered the Greek language for themselves.<sup>27</sup> His reservations applied even more strongly to biblical translation. He placed an edition of the Greek in the page facing the Latin translation and suggested alternative translations of numerous passages in the attached annotations.<sup>28</sup> In his *Ratio verae theologiae* (1519), he argued that a theologian needs at least a passive understanding of Greek and Hebrew, because it is impossible to understand the Bible without it.<sup>29</sup>

Erasmus' view on the role of inspiration in the translation process is ambiguous. On the one hand, he placed himself in the tradition of Jerome,

---

<sup>24</sup> For the debate on language learning in the context of biblical studies, see De Vocht 1951, 298–358.

<sup>25</sup> The text of the prologue is in the edition by Botfield (1861), 41-3, there 41.

<sup>26</sup> Erasmus, *Novum Instrumentum*, Basel, Froben, 1516. It would be reprinted in 1519, 1522, 1527 and 1535. The literature on Erasmus' New Testament is vast. Studies that concern his translation method and principles in particular are Rummel 1986 and de Jonge 1984; 2016.

<sup>27</sup> For Erasmus' general translation theory and practice, see Rummel 1985.

<sup>28</sup> For the nature of Erasmus' revision of the Vulgate, see de Jonge 2016.

<sup>29</sup> De Vocht 1951, 304.

arguing that translating the Bible was first and foremost a philological affair.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand, he believed that something of the inspiration of the original is lost in the translation process. He wrote that the words spoken by Christ himself – in the original language – were more sacred than those we read in translation:

[...] diuinae literae nescio quid habent natiuae fragrantiae, nescio quid spirant suum ac genuinum, si eo sermone legantur quo primum scripserunt ii qui partim e sacro illo ac coelesti hauserunt ore, partim eiusdem afflatis spiritu nobis tradiderunt.<sup>31</sup>

The Scriptures have about them some sort of natural fragrance, they breathe forth something genuine and all their own when read in the language in which their authors originally wrote them. These authors took them down directly from the sacred and heavenly lips of Christ, or they passed them on to us inspired by His Spirit.

The New Testament was itself a translation from the original Aramaic into Greek, as Erasmus was aware. He believed that the earliest translators, the evangelists and apostles, had been inspired. But this inspiration did not extend to later translators, who rendered the Bible into Latin or the vernacular languages.

This is where Erasmus' view differed from that of other sixteenth-century humanists. They all agreed on the importance of philology and language study, and they encouraged their readers to consult the Bible in the original languages. But for Erasmus, the Vulgate was a fallible, provisional translation. Although he did not mean to supplant it with his own Latin version, he provided an alternative for study purposes.<sup>32</sup> For this, he was attacked by other humanists who had no objection to studying the original languages, but who believed that it was impossible to improve on the Vulgate.<sup>33</sup>

### **Inspiration and translatability: Sutor**

We find a more extreme defence of the Vulgate in the work of Sutor (Pierre Couturier, 1475–1537), who was so convinced of its special status that he

---

<sup>30</sup> For Erasmus' ideas on biblical translation in particular, see Rummel 1985, 89–102.

<sup>31</sup> Ep. 373 (Allen 1906–1958 vol. 2, 170, ll. 167–170). This letter functioned as a preface to Erasmus' *Novum Instrumentum*. See the edition of the first part of Erasmus' *Annotationes*, ASD VI 5 (Erasmus 2000), 60.

<sup>32</sup> Erasmus discussed the purpose of his New Testament in the *Apologia* (1516, Erasmus, pages 163–73 in Holborn 1933).

<sup>33</sup> Such as Stunica, who worked on the Complutensian Polyglot together with Ximenes. Rummel 1989a, 145–77.

considered the source text as irrelevant. Sutor was optimistic about translatability because of the role of inspiration. In *De tralatione Bibliae* (1525), he reacted to the biblical scholarship of Erasmus, although he did not mention him by name. Sutor's book was approved by the theology faculty in Paris.<sup>34</sup> He was optimistic about translation – but only about that of the past, objecting to all new translations of the Bible and to vernacular translations in particular. Sutor believed that a translator who does not lead a holy life, is not orthodox, or undertakes the task for the wrong reasons, will not succeed. But above all, he needs the support of the Holy Spirit:

Atqui maxime opus est diuino auxilio in transferenda diuina scriptura. Denique exigitur coelestis gratia, et ea quidem peculiaris quae et deligat et dirigat ipsum interpretem. Non enim debet accedere nisi diuinitus et selectus et adiutus. Alioqui non spiritu diuino diuinam tralationem, sed humano spiritu prophanum opus efficeret. Eodem enim spiritu debet (Ieronymo teste) interpretari scriptura quo primum diuinitus hominibus reuelata est. At quis obsecro nunc est, vel etiam futurus speratur, cui haec omnia conuenire possint, quae in sacro Ieronymo inuenta sunt?<sup>35</sup>

But most of all translating sacred scripture calls for divine help. In a word, it requires grace from above, and particularly the kind that elects and directs the translator himself. No one must therefore undertake the task who is not divinely chosen and aided. Otherwise he would not produce a divine translation in a divine spirit, but a profane work in a human one. For as Jerome writes, scripture must be translated in the same spirit through which it was first divinely revealed to man. And who, I ask, is there alive now, or expected to be alive in the future, who could combine all these qualities in his person, which are found in Saint Jerome?

Jerome had produced a perfect translation because he was chosen and inspired. Without inspiration, however, it is impossible to translate the Bible.

### **Nida: philology and translation**

Now that the main positions in the Renaissance debate have been set out, we turn to the twentieth century and the work of Nida. Educated in New Testament Greek as well as linguistics, Nida started publishing scholarly articles on linguistics and biblical translation in the late 1940s. He wrote his most influential books from the 1960s to the early 1980s, two of which form the basis of my discussion of his work, *Toward a Science of Translating* and *The Theory and Practice of Translation*.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> For Sutor's work, see Rummel 1989b, 61–73.

<sup>35</sup> *De tralatione Bibliae*, Paris 1525, Fo. LXVr-v.

<sup>36</sup> Nida 1964; Nida & Taber 1969.

Nida proposed to systematize and professionalize the discipline of biblical translation by grounding it in contemporary theories of language and communication, such as lexical semantics and componential analysis. He believed that the meaning or message of the source text can be separated from its linguistic form. The latter is irrelevant for the translator, who should concentrate on the meaning alone, in order to reproduce the equivalent effect of the source text on its original receptors. Nida proposed that there were in fact two different types of equivalence. For the ‘equivalent of effect’, he coined the term ‘dynamic equivalence’. For equivalence based on word order, grammatical form, or figures of speech, he used ‘formal equivalence’.<sup>37</sup>

Nida was aware of historical debates about biblical translation, but considered them no longer relevant. In his chapter entitled *The Tradition of Translation in the Western World*, he summarized them under the headings of inspiration vs. philology, tradition vs. contemporary authority, and theology vs. grammar.<sup>38</sup> Yet although he placed himself outside this tradition of translation, he could not avoid choosing sides on the questions of translatability and inspiration. He was optimistic about the former, believing that ‘[anything] that can be said in one language can always be said in another [...]’.<sup>39</sup> This belief was based on assumptions about commonalities in language and similarities between cultures:

Underlying all the complications of translation is the fundamental fact that languages differ radically one from the other. In fact, so different are they that some insist that one cannot communicate adequately in one language what has been said originally in another. Nevertheless, as linguists and anthropologists have discovered, that which unites mankind is much greater than that which divides, and hence there is, even in cases of very disparate languages and cultures, a basis for communication.<sup>40</sup>

As for inspiration, Nida approached biblical translation philologically, believing that only the source text is inspired, not its translation. In a section on ‘wrong theological presuppositions,’ he writes that his view ‘in no way minimizes the doctrine of inspiration, but it does mean that one must look at

---

<sup>37</sup> Nida 1964, 156–92; Nida & Taber 1969, 12–32. Nida’s discussion of formal and dynamic equivalence was normative – although it varied from work to work. In *Toward a Science of Translating*, Nida observed a tendency toward dynamic equivalence in translation (Nida 1964, 160); in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, dynamic equivalence became a criterion for judging translations (Nida & Taber 1969, 173).

<sup>38</sup> Nida 1964, 11–29.

<sup>39</sup> Nida & Taber 1969, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Nida 1964, 2.

the words of the Bible as instruments by which the message is communicated and not as ends in themselves.’<sup>41</sup>

Nida’s *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969) opens with a chapter entitled *A New Concept of Translating*.<sup>42</sup> There, he lists several ‘new’ attitudes to biblical translation: ‘each language has its own genius’ (p. 3); ‘to communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language’ (p. 4); ‘anything that can be said in one language can be said in another’ (p. 4); ‘the languages of the Bible are subject to the same limitations as any other natural language’ (p. 5), and must be ‘understood and analysed in the same manner as any other ancient tongues’ (p. 5).

Although Nida presented these attitudes as new, he shared them with some of the humanists discussed above. The fifteenth-century Italian humanists, Valla in particular, shared Nida’s belief in translatability and his emphasis on natural language. There is, however, a difference in emphasis. Nida’s work addresses the question of translatability rather than inspiration. This holds true for twentieth-century debates in general. Later criticism of Nida concentrated on his optimism about translatability and his belief in the separation of meaning and form. Exegetes and literary scholars in particular emphasized the importance of literary language and genre conventions in the Bible. But Nida’s theological presuppositions were not questioned.<sup>43</sup> This makes modern theory very different from Renaissance theory.

### **Aim, context, and the nature of theory**

This brings us to the contextual factors that influenced the theory of both periods. Some of these are obvious: debates on biblical translation reflect the religious and academic conflicts of the time. In the early sixteenth century, they were influenced by the Reformation. New translations, especially those made into the vernacular, were immediately associated with the Lutheran movement. This is the context in which Sutor wrote his work: he aimed to defend the tradition of the church against Lutheranism.

As regards academic discussions, biblical translation was one of the main topics in the conflict between humanists and scholastics about the university curriculum. In the late middle ages, biblical studies had been the territory of academic theologians, who read the Bible in the context of scholasticism. They were not interested in the clarity or elegance of the translation or in its original languages. Humanist authors promoted a very different university

---

<sup>41</sup> Nida & Taber 1969, 101. There is also a short section on *Pressures from Tradition* in Nida 1964, 179–80.

<sup>42</sup> Nida 1964, 1–11.

<sup>43</sup> Pattemore 2007, 228–62.

curriculum with more emphasis on rhetoric and grammar. Eventually, they also claimed the right to engage in biblical studies, arguing that traditional scholastic theology was outdated and irrelevant. Thus, their reflections on biblical translation were written in a context of academic rivalry.<sup>44</sup> This is the context in which Erasmus wrote his reflections on biblical translation.<sup>45</sup>

Other contextual factors are less obvious. Historical theories should be understood in the context of the literary conventions and preferences of the time. For this reason, historians of translation have offered frameworks that concentrate on the interactions between translation theory and contemporary literary conventions, especially the tradition of classical rhetoric.<sup>46</sup> The earliest Renaissance debates in biblical translation were about models, language and style, and the nature of the *studia humanitatis*. This is the context in which Valla wrote his reflections on biblical translation. He was criticized by Poggio – another humanist. They disagreed on the authority of classical authors, which was sacred to Poggio but questioned by Valla.<sup>47</sup>

We should keep in mind that modern theorists also write within a broader intellectual context. Nida's aim was to provide translation studies with scientific legitimacy. The aim of his work was '[to bring] to the subject of translation numerous insights which have become increasingly significant in a number of related fields.'<sup>48</sup> The off-hand way in which Nida dismisses the age-long debate on the inspiration of biblical translation reflects his scientific aspirations: in a twentieth-century context, such questions were not considered academic. Scientific legitimacy was of course not Nida's only aim: working for the United Bible Society, he developed tools for translators in the mission field. This may have been an additional reason for him to present his ideas on translation in a form that was acceptable to the community of academic linguists and communication scientists: his underlying motives could have made him intellectually suspect.<sup>49</sup>

This brings us to a final fundamental difference between the Renaissance and the twentieth century: the form and nature of theory. I have used this word to cover a wide variety of reflections on biblical translation, in order to

---

<sup>44</sup> For this conflict, see e.g. Rummel 1995b.

<sup>45</sup> For Erasmus' position in this debate in particular, see Rummel 1989a and Rummel 1989b.

<sup>46</sup> Renner 1989 is the most elaborate study. For a study of Renaissance biblical translation in particular in connection with rhetoric, see Eskhult 2012.

<sup>47</sup> For the conflict between Valla and Poggio, see for example the introduction to Wesseling's edition of Valla's *Antidotum primum* (Valla 1978). See also Cesarini Martinelli 1980 and Cortesi 1997.

<sup>48</sup> Nida 1964, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Lawrence Venuti criticized Nida for these underlying motives (Venuti 1995, 21-22).

identify developments and similarities across periods. However, using the word ‘theory’ for the reflections of Renaissance authors is problematic. Renaissance authors wrote their reflections on translation in prefaces to the reader and dedicatory letters to patrons. Their comments are often highly rhetorical and serve the occasion. This holds true for almost all Renaissance texts, including the examples we have seen above. When Valla wrote that his translation was as much sacred Scripture as the Vulgate, he was reacting to a polemical attack by Poggio, which was part of a long series of invectives from both sides. They only touched upon the subject of biblical translation in the midst of numerous other accusations and differences of opinion. When Adrianus emphasized the importance of learning the source languages of the Bible, he did so in his capacity of professor of Hebrew at the *Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense*, promoting the education he offered there. Ximenes’ claim that the Bible needed to be studied in the original appeared in a preface to a multilingual Bible, and was intended to justify his own work.

This does not mean that these authors were insincere in their reflections on biblical translation. Their statements are illustrative of their opinions and of the broader intellectual context of the time, but they are hardly academic scientific statements. Reading Renaissance sources as systematic theory does not do justice to the historical situation.<sup>50</sup>

### Conclusions

Once discussions of biblical translation are compared from the points of view of translatability and inspiration, it becomes clear that modern theory, as represented here by Nida, is part of a tradition that goes back to antiquity, and that it corresponds to the views of fifteenth-century Italian humanists. But, as we have demonstrated, the emphasis is different: in modern theory it is placed mostly on translatability versus provisionality, whereas in Renaissance debates it is on the question of philology versus inspiration.

This difference in emphasis results from the context in which the debates took place. The authors we have discussed not only reflected on biblical translation, they also questioned the authority of classical models, claimed

---

<sup>50</sup> One example of reading modern academic practice into Renaissance texts is Norton 1981, where the author writes that a Renaissance author’s ‘theoretical program’ is a ‘concerted attempt to improve on Bruni by formulating a doctrine of critical good sense not unrelated to St. Jerome’s quiet relativism.’ Norton 1981, 197. Here it seems as if the Renaissance author (Manetti) reacted to the scientific theories of Bruni and Jerome in the same way as modern translation theorists comment on each other’s work. But Manetti used these sources in a way that fitted the rhetorical practice of the time, where Jerome was an authority. He does not even mention Bruni by name. For Manetti’s translation theory, see above, footnote 22.

territory in the university curriculum, defended the traditions of the Catholic Church against Protestant attacks, or claimed scientific legitimacy for translation studies. Furthermore, these Renaissance authors did not write in order to develop a systematic theory with scientifically grounded principles. They wrote according to the literary conventions and scholarly standards of their time. What both periods have in common is that the intensity of the debates on biblical translation reflects changes in the approach to the sacred text and the discipline of translation.

### Bibliography

- Allen, Percy S. (ed.) 1906–1958, *Opus epistolarum Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, Oxford.
- Barr, James 1979, *The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations*, Göttingen (*Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens* 15).
- Bod, Rens 2013, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*, Oxford.
- Botfield, Beriah (ed.) 1861, *Prefaces to the First Editions of the Greek and Roman Classics and of the Sacred Scriptures*, London.
- Botley, Paul 2004, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti and Desiderius Erasmus*, Cambridge.
- Camporeale, Salvatore 1972, *Lorenzo Valla: Umanesimo e teologia*, Florence.
- Celenza, Christopher S. 1994, “Renaissance Humanism and the New Testament: Lorenzo Valla’s Annotations to the Vulgate”, *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24, 33–52.
- Celenza, Christopher S. 2012, “Lorenzo Valla’s Radical Philology: The ‘Preface’ to the Annotations to the New Testament in Context”, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42,2, 365–394.
- Cesarini Martinelli, Lucia 1980, “Note sulla polemica Poggio-Valla e sulla fortuna delle *Elegantiae*”, *Interpres* 3, 29–79.
- Cortesi, Mariarosa 1997, “Lorenzo Valla, Girolamo e la Vulgata”, *Motivi letterari ed esegetici in Gerolamo*. Atti del convegno a Trento il 5–7 dicembre 1995, eds.: Claudio Moreschini & Giovanni Menestrina, Brescia (*Religione e cultura* 9), 269–289.
- De Jonge, Henk Jan 1984, “Novum Testamentum a Nobis Versum: The Essence of Erasmus’ Edition of the New Testament”, *The Journal of Theological Studies (New Series)* 35,2, 394–413.
- De Jonge, Henk Jan 2016, “Erasmus’ Translation of the New Testament: Aim and Method”, *The Bible Translator* 67,1, 29–41.
- De Petris, Alfonso 1975, “Le teorie umanistiche del tradurre e l’‘Apologeticus’ di Giannozzo Manetti”, *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 37,1, 15–32.
- De Petris, Alfonso 2008, “Manetti, teorico e apologeta dell’arte umanistica del tradurre”, *Dignitas et Excellentia Hominis*. Atti del convegno internazionale di “Studi su Giannozzo Manetti”, ed.: Stefano U. Baldassarri, Florence, 169–187.
- De Vocht, Henry 1951, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550*, Leuven.
- Den Haan, Annet 2016, “Valla on Biblical Scholarship: Metadiscourse at the

- Court of Nicholas V”, *The Metadiscourse of Renaissance Humanism*, ed.: Annet den Haan (*Renaissanceforum* 11, [www.renaissanceforum.dk](http://www.renaissanceforum.dk)), 23–40.
- Di Napoli, Giovanni 1971, *Lorenzo Valla: Filosofia e religione nell’umanesimo italiano*, Rome.
- Erasmus, Desiderius 1516, *Novum Instrumentum omne*, Basel.
- Erasmus, Desiderius 2000, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum (pars prima)*, ed.: Pieter F. Hovingh, Amsterdam.
- Eskhult, Josef 2012, “Latin Bible Translations in the Protestant Reformation: Historical Contexts, Philological Justification, and the Impact of Classical Rhetoric on the Conception of Translation Methods”, *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, eds.: Bruce Gordon & Matthew McLean, Leiden and Boston, 167–185.
- Fischer, Bonifatius, & Robert Weber (eds.) 1969, *Biblia Sacra: iuxta Vulgatae versionem*, Stuttgart.
- Fois, Mario 1969, *Il pensiero cristiano di Lorenzo Valla nel quadro storico-culturale del suo ambiente*, Rome.
- Hamilton, Alastair 1996, “Humanists and the Bible”, *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed.: Jill Kraye, Cambridge, 100–117.
- Holborn, Hajo & Annemarie Holborn (eds.) 1933, *Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus. Ausgewählte Werke*, Munich.
- Kelly, Louis G. 1979, *The True Interpreter: A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West*, New York.
- Linde, Cornelia 2012, *How to Correct the Sacra Scriptura? Textual Criticism of the Latin Bible between the Twelfth and Fifteenth Century*, Oxford.
- Manetti, Giannozzo 1981, *Apologeticus*, ed.: Alfonso De Petris, Rome (*Tem e Testi* 29).
- Manetti, Giannozzo 2016, *A Translator’s Defense*, ed.: Myron McShane; trans.: Mark Young, Cambridge (MA) & London (*I Tatti Renaissance Library* 71).
- Monfasani, John 2008, “Criticism of Biblical Humanists in Quattrocento Italy”, *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus*, ed.: Erika Rummel, Leiden & Boston, 15–38.
- Nida, Eugene A. 1964, *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden.
- Nida, Eugene A. & Charles R. Taber 1969, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Leiden.
- Norton, Glyn P. 1981, “Humanist Foundations of Translation Theory (1400–1450): A Study in the Dynamics of the Word”, *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 8,2, 173–203.
- Norton, Glyn P. 1984, *The Ideology and Language of Translation in*

- Renaissance France and Their Humanist Antecedents*, Genève.
- Olofsson, Staffan 2009, *Translation Technique and Theological Exegesis: Collected Essays on the Septuagint Version*, Winona Lake (IN).
- Pattimore, Stephen 2007, "Framing Nida: The Relevance of Translation Theory in the United Bible Societies", *A History of Bible Translations*, ed.: Philip A. Noss, Rome (*History of Bible translation 1*), 217–263.
- Pym, Anthony 2007, "On the Historical Epistemologies of Bible Translating", *A History of Bible Translation*, ed.: Philip A. Noss, Rome (*History of Bible translation 1*), 195–215.
- Rener, Frederick M. 1989, *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler*, Amsterdam.
- Rummel, Erika 1985, *Erasmus as a Translator of the Classics*, Toronto, Buffalo & London.
- Rummel, Erika 1986, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: From Philologist to Theologian*, Toronto, Buffalo & London.
- Rummel, Erika 1989a, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics I: 1515–1522*, Nieuwkoop.
- Rummel, Erika 1989b, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics II: 1523–1536*, Nieuwkoop.
- Rummel, Erika 1995a, "In Defense of 'theologizing Humanists': Aurelio Brandolini's 'In Sacram Ebreorum Historiam...prefatio'", *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 44, 90–106.
- Rummel, Erika 1995b, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance and Reformation*, Cambridge (MA).
- Schwarz, Werner 1955, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background*, Cambridge.
- Schwarz, Werner 1963, "The History of Principles of Bible Translation in the Western World", *Babel* IX, 5–22.
- Schwarz, Werner 1985, "Prinzipien der Bibelübersetzung", *Schriften zur Bibelübersetzung und mittelalterlichen Übersetzungstheorie*, eds.: Werner Schwarz, Rainhild D. Wells, Jochen Bepler & Heimo Reinitzer, Hamburg, 36–41.
- Snell-Hornby, Mary 1995, *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia (PA).
- Steiner, George 1975, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, New York.
- Sutor 1525, *De tralatione bibliae, et novarum reprobatione interpretationum*, Paris.
- Valla, Lorenzo 1962, *Opera Omnia*, ed.: Eugenio Garin, Turin.
- Valla, Lorenzo 1970, *Collatio Novi Testamenti*, ed.: Alessandro Perosa, Florence.

- Valla, Lorenzo 1978, *Antidotum Primum: La Prima Apologia Contro Poggio Bracciolini*, ed.: Ari Wesseling, Assen.
- Van der Louw, Theo A. W. 2007, *Transformations in the Septuagint: Towards an Interaction of Septuagint Studies and Translation Studies*, Leuven.
- Venuti, Lawrence 1995, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London.



# EDITING AND TRANSLATING PLINY IN RENAISSANCE ITALY:



## Agency, collaboration and visibility<sup>1</sup>

By Andrea Rizzi

*Abstract: The present article applies a recent approach concerning visibility and agency articulated by Mairi McLaughlin, Theo Hermans and Sharon Deane-Cox. It does so by making a case study of paratextual features of successive editions and translations of Pliny the Elder's Natural History produced in late Quattrocento and Cinquecento Italy. The aim is to illuminate specific ways in which editors, translators or printers made themselves manifestly visible to readers, and asserted their agency by claiming different types of collaboration: synchronous (translator and printer working together on a new project), asynchronous (translator, editor or printer expressly acknowledging the work of an earlier translator or editor, whether perfunctorily or otherwise) or concealed (editors or translators availing themselves of earlier works by fellow scholars without acknowledgement). Asynchronous collaboration is an understudied aspect of Renaissance translation. This article is an attempt to fill this gap.*

### Introduction

In a 2012 essay, Anne Coldiron re-examined Lawrence Venuti's claim that the notion of invisible translators and translation has dominated the history of British and American translation. Coldiron's study invited scholars to study and re-evaluate marks of translators' visibility.<sup>2</sup> 'Visibility' refers to the multiple and complex ways in which translators and their editors or publishers present their work, and the value they place upon it, their aspirations, and

---

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions. I also wish to thank Brenda Hosington and Marianne Pade for their support and advice. I am indebted to Belén Bistué, Christina Dyson, Cynthia Troup, and Eva Del Soldato for reading versions of my article. All translations into English are mine, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Coldiron 2012. Coldiron's essay is a direct response to Lawrence Venuti's study of the translator's invisibility in English translations from the mid-seventeenth century to the present. See Venuti 1995/2008.

collaboration through the dedication or presentation letters that accompany their translations. By way of response to Coldiron's call, this article examines the paratextual features of Italian Renaissance editions and translations of Pliny's *Naturalis Historia* to gauge how editors and translators asserted various degrees of visibility by making claims of collaboration with printers and fellow scholars.<sup>3</sup>

How does one assess the visibility of translators? In her analysis of a corpus of twenty-first-century translated and original French fictions, Mairi McLaughlin suggests that translators are always visible, since they are bound to leave linguistic or cultural traces that are either overtly visible, covertly visible, or 'invisibly' visible. By 'invisibly visible' McLaughlin means that even when the work of translators is only perceptible by means of linguistic analysis, some visibility is always present.<sup>4</sup> A highly conspicuous example of a twentieth-century translator's 'overt visibility' is found in Clement Egerton's 1939 discordant translation of the seventeenth-century Chinese novel *Jin P'ing Mei* as *The Golden Lotus*, published in London by George Routledge. In this English version, the translator declares that the book had to be "produced in its entirety", and resorts to Latin where he considered passages in the narrative too sexually explicit.<sup>5</sup> Code-switching (between Latin and English) in the body of *The Golden Lotus* of 1939 denotes the translator's and publisher's dissociation from the novel's frank descriptions of sexual activity. The use of Latin is therefore a means to soften or conceal the pornographic content of the novel. This is an evident case of a modern translator and publisher manifestly interpolating into the translation evidence of a shared ideological concern about the novel's sexual morality — collaborating to determine an acceptable (or tolerable) textual intervention.

A different way of evidencing the "translator's individual and social signature" is suggested by Theo Hermans. Twenty-first-century readers should see translation as reported or echoed speech in which "the translator, as an authorial presence, lets the original author speak in his or her own name". According to Hermans, this type of reading unsettles conventional perceptions of contemporary translation and gives more prominence to the agency of translators.<sup>6</sup> Here, 'agency' refers to the strategies undertaken by editors, translators and printers — and others associated with the book market for translations — to position themselves and their work whether overtly or

---

<sup>3</sup> On microhistory and translation history see Adamo 2006.

<sup>4</sup> McLaughlin 2008, 62. A re-historization of translators' invisibility, with a focus on the English Renaissance, is offered by Coldiron 2012. I will discuss Coldiron's re-assessment of this history at the end of this article.

<sup>5</sup> Egerton 1939. I have taken Egerton's statement from Hermans 2014, 291.

<sup>6</sup> Hermans 2014, 299.

covertly.<sup>7</sup> While describing paratextual interventions as “straightforward [...] visible traces” and “formal translatorial intrusions”, Hermans also encourages broader study of “the translator’s role in mediating the values inscribed in the translation to its prospective readers”.<sup>8</sup> His suggestion has been taken up by Sharon Deane-Cox in her study of retranslations and re-editions of Gustave Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and George Sand’s *Le Mare au Diable* in late nineteenth- and twentieth- century England. There, she considered paratextual, textual and extratextual elements contributing to the production and reception of re-editions or retranslations. The paratext often provides evidence “for the type and extent of interactions between the (re)translations”.<sup>9</sup> It also sheds light on economic or symbolic motivations underpinning retranslation or re-editing, the translators’, printers’, or editors’ agency, and the dynamics of the target literary system.<sup>10</sup>

The present article follows Hermans’s and Deane-Cox’s investigation of translators’ or editors’ paratextual posturing aimed at bolstering the symbolic capital of their work. It does so by making a case study of the paratextual features of successive editions and translations of Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* produced in late Quattrocento and Cinquecento Italy. The aim is to illuminate specific ways in which editors, translators or printers made themselves manifestly visible to readers and asserted their agency by claiming different types of collaboration: synchronous (translator and printer working together on a new project), asynchronous (translator, editor or printer expressly acknowledging the work of an earlier translator or editor, whether perfunctorily or otherwise) or concealed (editors or translators availing themselves of earlier works by fellow scholars without acknowledgement). The resultant textual mobility could effectively collapse linear time; also, at least in some instances, it could share claims to agency among different individuals. All the Renaissance editors and translators discussed here (Giovanni Andrea Bussi, Cristoforo Landino, Giovanni Brancati, Antonio Brucioli and Ludovico Domenichi) exploited collaboration as an editorial practice aimed at attracting readers, while also canvassing literary allegiances between present and past editors, translators and printers. Claims of collaborative editing and translation — an interdependence of translators, whether alongside their contemporaries, or over generations — emerge strongly in the case study examined here.

---

<sup>7</sup> Inghilleri 2005/2014, 66. See also Wolf & Fukari 2007, 1–3.

<sup>8</sup> Hermans 2014, 287.

<sup>9</sup> Deane-Cox 2014, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Deane-Cox, 48. Unfortunately, premodern literature scholars cannot always rely on extratextual material such as book reviews or book contracts, thus making it difficult to gauge the reception of retranslations or re-editions in the target literary field.

A brief clarification is necessary at this point. Following from Deane-Cox's study, in this article I examine editors and translators together. Such an approach arises from the recognition of the fact that, in some instances, early modern translators and editors were also printers or worked with texts in all three capacities (William Caxton and Aldo Manuzio being the most notable examples in Renaissance Europe). That is, in practice the roles of editor, translator and printer were not always easily distinguishable. As a result, credit or criticism for new publications could not be precisely dispensed. Even if editors, proofreaders or *correttori* were often scorned for their lack of care, their insufficient expertise or knowledge and their insatiable greed, they were just as often praised for their beneficial work, and charged with the task of translating from Latin into the vernacular.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, with reference to an ancient text such as Pliny's *Natural History*, it is fruitful to consider both editing and translation as aspects of the larger process of recontextualisation. Translation always involves editing and editing frequently requires some level of translation.<sup>12</sup>

### Multiple versions — multiple interests

The Quattrocento and Cinquecento editors and translators of Pliny's *Natural History* discussed below were all humanists — multilingual intellectuals with well-established careers in teaching, editing, publishing and translating. They were often required to produce vernacular versions of Latin translations from Greek, an activity that did not conform to their career and financial aspirations: the skills of the translator and requests of the patron or printer were not always complementary, thus magnifying the difficulties that they understood to inhere in the work of translation.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Italian Renaissance editors and translators referred openly to these difficulties, as well as to the restrictions of time, and the particular requests underscoring their work. The possibility of a perfect translation postulated by Leonardo Bruni in his *On the Correct Way to Translate (De interpretatione recta, 1424–1426)* remained for the Renaissance translator a mirage or, as Belén Bistué has observed, a paradox: the difficulty of the task was well understood to make any translation imperfect even as it remained a significant stimulus for new translations and adaptations of specific works. Furthermore, the notion of translation as a unifying process in which the source text was

---

<sup>11</sup> Richardson 1994, 3–4. See also Trovato 2009, 51–102.

<sup>12</sup> Peterson 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Biow 2015, 44 and 119. See also Terpening 1997, *passim*, and Richardson 1994, 90–91.

‘fully’ transferred into a new text contradicted the fact that translation always created a double.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, beyond the Brunian ideals, successive versions of the same text could clearly reveal the need for its ongoing revision and re-contextualisation. Early modern printers exploited this variability by feeding into the market multiple revised editions, new translations or re-translations. However, these, and the agents involved in their production, did not entirely displace earlier editors and translators. Instead, the newer publications entered into dialogue with preceding versions, thus offering readers and patrons choice. This dialogue is evidenced in the extremely rich corpus of paratexts created to accompany Quattrocento and Cinquecento translations, which frequently articulates the social, cultural and linguistic context for editing and translation.<sup>15</sup> Also, in contrast to Bruni’s early theorisation of translation as a unitary and single-authored achievement, this corpus reveals a profoundly collaborative approach to the task of translation.<sup>16</sup>

The successive Latin editions and vernacular versions of Pliny’s *Natural History* under discussion shed light on the relationship between two often concomitant factors in the print industry and practice of translation in the Renaissance: on the one hand, the market for printed books was subject to merciless economic forces that required publishers, editors and translators to compete against one another. On the other hand, the scope of the translating, editing and printing activities that were essential to the same market was often determined by the ‘old-fashioned’ rules of patronage.<sup>17</sup> This article shows how collaboration between financiers, patrons and intellectuals in the production of successive editions and translations allowed for the coexistence of multiple interests and cultural conditions. Specifically, the editors and translators often acknowledged the value of one another’s work, even when allegedly competing for money and prestige. By giving visibility to themselves and to earlier agents of translation, editors, translators and printers accounted for the multiple alignments underlying Renaissance translation: bolstering the literary capital of start text, legitimizing the latest translator or

---

<sup>14</sup> Bistué 2013, 4–8, and Bistué 2017.

<sup>15</sup> See Rizzi 2017, Richardson 1994, and Richardson 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Bruni’s theorisation remained highly influential throughout the Italian Renaissance, chiefly thanks to the hundreds of re-editions and translations of his own translations from Greek into Latin. See Hankins 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Fierce competition in the Italian Renaissance print industry is discussed by Trovato 2009, 29–31 and Richardson 1994, 90–91. Printing as a practice closely linked to patronage and gift-giving is discussed by Roberts 2013 in the context of Francesco Berlinghieri’s *Geographia*.

editor, or making collaborative claims aimed at enhancing social and cultural capital.<sup>18</sup>

### **The visible editors of Pliny's *Natural History***

The encyclopedic scientific work by Pliny the Elder known as the *Natural History* was undoubtedly one of the most prized and studied ancient texts of the Italian fifteenth century.<sup>19</sup> During the last three decades of the Quattrocento (1469–1499), eighteen Latin and vernacular incunable editions and translations were produced.<sup>20</sup> The importance accorded these books was so great that some copies were printed on parchment, making them five to seven times more expensive than the paper-based versions.<sup>21</sup> As for the philological restoration of Pliny's Latin text, this challenge preoccupied several mid-fifteenth-century Italian scholars, and promised a lucrative business opportunity for printers. The first printed and full edition of Pliny's *Natural History* to appear in the early modern world was Johannes de Spira's in 1469, in Venice.<sup>22</sup> This was complemented within less than a year by Conrad Sweynheym and Arnold Pannartz's 1470 edition, published in Rome under the editorial expertise of Giovanni Andrea Bussi (1417–1475).<sup>23</sup>

As fifteenth-century readers had already come to expect from a first printed edition of an ancient work, the preface of Spira's 1469 first early modern edition focuses on Pliny as the author of the treatise: on his life, and on his reception by other Classical authors. Therefore, this edition opens with a passage from the life of Pliny the Elder written by the early Imperial Roman historian Suetonius. By contrast, in the 1470 edition, the first paratextual feature is a dedication to Pope Paul II (r. 1464–1471) contributed by the editor Giovanni Andrea Bussi.<sup>24</sup> There follow two epistles by Pliny the Younger

---

<sup>18</sup> I use here 'start' instead of 'source' text in agreement with Pym 2016. Like today, Renaissance translators often did not work just from a single text.

<sup>19</sup> On the reception of Pliny in late Quattrocento and Cinquecento see Fera 1995.

<sup>20</sup> Rozzo 2011, 74 and n4.

<sup>21</sup> Rozzo 2011, 77 and n21.

<sup>22</sup> Pliny 1469. I have consulted Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, INC. V. 001 (accessed online at <http://www.internetculturale.it/jmms/iccuviewer/iccu.jsp?id=oai%3A193.206.197.121%3A18%3AVE0049%3AVEAE128055&mode=all&teca=marciana> on 11 April 2017), and Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, OEXV 10 RES (accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/OEXV10R> on 8 April 2017). On late Quattrocento Latin editions of Pliny's work see Rozzo 2011, 82–84; Monfasani 1988, 1–31, and Sabbadini 1900.

<sup>23</sup> Pliny 1470. I have consulted München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, BSB-Ink P-600 (accessed online at <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00063289/images/> on 4 April 2017), ISTC ip00787000. On Bussi see Haig Gaisser 2008, 160–172.

<sup>24</sup> On Pope Paul II, printing, and the Roman curia during his rule see among others Carver 2007, 163–172, and Feld 1988.

(*Epistula ad Marcum* and *Epistula ad Tacitum*), and excerpts from Suetonius, Tertullian and Eusebius on Pliny the Elder's life and work.<sup>25</sup> Two years later, in 1472, Nicolas Jenson republished the 1470 edition of the *Natural History* in Venice, but Bussi's dedication is placed at the end of the volume, with Pliny the Younger's letters and the other excerpts from ancient authors still preceding the main narrative.<sup>26</sup> Possibly, by reshuffling the order of the paratextual materials from the 1470 edition, Jenson aimed to downplay Bussi's editorial role, or to present the text printed in Venice as notably different from the previous edition. That said, Bussi's dedication to Pope Paul II was not removed altogether, in an open recognition of his editorial work. So Bussi's overt visibility was perhaps reduced but not eradicated.

Some months afterwards, in 1473, another edition of the Latin text was published in Rome, once again by Sweynheym and Pannartz. In this new edition, the paratextual extracts from ancient sources are found reorganised once more, with the more obvious difference appearing on the first page: the letter by Pliny of the Younger is here correctly addressed to Vespasian instead of Domitian (Domitian had been wrongly stated in the previous editions).<sup>27</sup> This conspicuous emendation was intended to serve as proof of the significant improvement and refinement of the Latin text.

The 1473 edition published in Rome was edited by the humanist Niccolò Perotti (1430?–1480), although his name does not appear anywhere in the text.<sup>28</sup> During his lifetime, Perotti was known for his fierce opposition to the practice by contemporary editors of leaving traces of their work in the form of personal comments or clearly identifiable emendations: he went so far as to describe the use of editorial prefaces as “joining a sewer to the altar” (*arae cloacam iungere*).<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the lively humanist debates elicited by the editing and translation of Latin and Greek texts at the time made Perotti's identity visible to the readers and patrons for whom these printed works were intended. With reference to the 1473 edition of the *Natural History*, fellow scholar Domizio Calderini was vitriolic in his critique, claiming to have found

---

<sup>25</sup> See Rozzo 2011, 85.

<sup>26</sup> Pliny 1472. I have consulted London, British Library, C.2.d.7 (IC.19663), and Boston, Public Library, Q.401.25 (accessed online at <https://archive.org/details/caiiplyniisecund00plin> on 12 March 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Pliny 1473. Compare f. 3v in the 1470 edition (“Caius Plinius Secundus Novocomensis Domitiano suo salutem”) against f. 1r in the 1473 edition (“C. Plinius Secundus Novocomensis Vespasiano suo salutem”).

<sup>28</sup> I have consulted the copy held in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, RES-S-107. On Perotti and his philological work on Pliny's text see Monfasani 1988 and Charlet 2003b, 177–82. See also D'Alessandro 2015 and Charlet 2011, 2–6.

<sup>29</sup> Charlet 2003b, 70. See also Feld 1988, 30–32. and Monfasani 1988, 5 and 26.

more than 275 errors in the publication.<sup>30</sup> Humanist critiques and invectives were eminently public, and were often followed by rebuttals and further vehement literary and personal attacks.<sup>31</sup>

Within such a short turnaround of editions (produced between 1469 and 1473) the traceable reorganisation of the paratextual material, as well as the emendations made to the Latin text, allowed readers and patrons to discern and appreciate the differences between the four iterations of Pliny's work. But the paratextual elements also point to a highly collaborative environment. As indicated above, Perotti refused to plainly mark Pliny's text with his own editorial interventions, while he publicly attacked Bussi's use of prefaces for the purpose of achieving visibility. Bussi responded to Perotti's scathing comments in the preface to his edition of Cicero's letters: "I would gain from working anonymously and from not writing prefaces", wrote Bussi, since they attracted the disapproval of "very fastidious men".<sup>32</sup> Bussi explains that his choice to make his role visible to the readers and patron was for the benefit of the printing venture, and for the benefit of the "rough, if not to say rustic, readers" (*asperioribus, ne dicam rusticis*).<sup>33</sup> Bussi also reveals the collaborative nature of his editorial work: he availed himself of the assistance of fellow scholars, whom he acknowledges openly. For instance, in the above-mentioned preface to Cicero's letters, Bussi reveals the assistance of Cardinal Giacomo Ammannati-Piccolomini for the edition of Cicero's letters to Atticus.<sup>34</sup> The preface to his edition of Pliny mentions the collaboration of Theodore Gaza in the preparation of the proofs — using the verb *adiuvare* to emphasise the practical nature of the textual assistance rendered.<sup>35</sup>

Collaboration was in fact extremely common among humanists, as well as between scholars and artists, and editors, translators and printers. Marsilio Ficino, George of Trebizond and Aldo Manuzio are some of the key figures

---

<sup>30</sup> Rozzo 2011, 91. See also Monfasani 2011, 184, Charlet 2003a, 11–12. See also Charlet 2003b, and Charlet 1999.

<sup>31</sup> On humanist invective see Rizzi 2015, 123.

<sup>32</sup> Here is the full passage from Bussi's preface to his edition of Cicero's Letters (Rome: Sweynheym and Pannartz, 1470) reads as follows: "Si labor meus est nauseae viris delicatissimis [...] relinquunt eos asperioribus [...]. Errores si sunt qui mihi inscribi debeant, multum per eos lucrur, autoris nomine epistola oppressa celato." I quote from Bussi 1978, 47.

<sup>33</sup> Bussi 1978, 47.

<sup>34</sup> Bussi 1978, 47: "Equidem hac in parte praecipue adiutus ab elegantissimo dignissimoque fratre tuo Sancti Chrysogoni cardinale Papiensi [...]."

<sup>35</sup> See Bussi 1978, 44: "Iuvit sane ac mirifice iuvit conatus meos [...] Theodorus meus Gaza". Perotti himself had collaborated with fellow humanists on the publication of Cardinal Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis* (1469). Perotti translated several of Bessarion's works from Greek into Latin silently. See Monfasani 1988, 13. On Bessarion's *In calumniatorem Platonis* see Del Soldato 2012, 109–122: especially 114–121.

of Quattrocento Italy to take full advantage of humanist practices of collaboration in the editing and translation of texts. It is also well known how humanists relied on more established scholars and friends to ensure that their Latin texts would meet the highest intellectual and philological standards. Humanist culture was made possible by the practice of peer emendations or corrections.<sup>36</sup>

Evidently, the four Latin editions of Pliny discussed here were the result of multiple collaborative practices: joint editing, solicited or unsolicited corrections spurred by competition, and silent or explicit acknowledgement of reliance on earlier publications. These editions reveal the multiple and intertextual process of textual mediation from manuscript to print, and from one edition to the next. In this often-dialogic process, editors and printers chose (or were forced to choose) anonymity, or to declare their own authority, while leaving indelible traces of their agency in the edited text, and formally in the paratextual frame.

### **Visible translators of Pliny**

Another significant process in the Renaissance mediation of Pliny's work occurred through the successive translations of the *Natural History* from Latin into the vernacular. In 1474, King Ferdinand of Naples (c. 1458–1494, also known as Ferrante) commissioned Cristoforo Landino to translate the treatise into the Florentine language. The two codices containing this translation are beautifully decorated and richly bound.<sup>37</sup> Yet Landino's translation does not appear to have satisfied the king, who had wished to offer this work as a gift to Charles the Bold, to celebrate the betrothal of Charles's daughter Mary to Federico, Ferdinand's second son.<sup>38</sup> The king turned to Giovanni Brancati (1440s–1481?), a distinguished humanist at his court, to obtain another vernacular version of Pliny's text, this time in Neapolitan.<sup>39</sup> Brancati took a highly critical stance against Landino's Tuscan version, to the point that he desisted from improving the manuscript version Landino had just presented to King Ferdinand. Rather, Brancati set out to translate Pliny

---

<sup>36</sup> See Grafton 2001, 150–154 and Rizzo 1973, 265–268.

<sup>37</sup> The two manuscripts are described in Antonazzo 2011, 346–347. The manuscripts are held in Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, mss. H.1.2 and H.1.3. See also Barbato 2001.

<sup>38</sup> Marcelli 2011.

<sup>39</sup> On the reception of Landino's translation at the Neapolitan court and Brancati's version see Passarelli 2003. The only copy of Brancati's translation is in manuscript and incomplete: Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, mss. H.1.9. More broadly on Landino's vernacular translation see Landino 1974; Cardini 1973, and Fubini 1995. Landino seems to have used the 1472 Latin edition of Pliny edited by Bussi: see Ageno 1956, 491, and Passarelli 2003, 117.

anew, using the Latin edition prepared by Filippo Beroaldo and published in 1476, in Parma.<sup>40</sup> Brancati's approach could not have been more different to that taken by Landino: instead of promoting the vernacular (Tuscan in the case of Landino; Neapolitan in the case of Brancati), Brancati Latinised the local vernacular, in clear opposition to the progressive Tuscanisation of the Italian vernaculars.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the lukewarm reception of Landino's translation at the court of Naples, it was published by Nicholas Jenson in Florence in 1476 thanks to the financial support of two expatriate Florentine merchants based in Venice, Girolamo Strozzi and Giambattista Ridolfi.<sup>42</sup> This 1476 printed version of Landino's translation preserves the preface that Landino addressed to the Neapolitan king. Jenson printed a staggering 1,025 copies of Landino's Tuscan version of the *Natural History*. To print such numbers, the two Florentine merchants needed to invest the extraordinary sum of 1,520 ducats, including the fifty paid to the translator: this was a considerable investment, even for affluent merchants, making it likely that King Ferdinand was involved in the printing venture.<sup>43</sup> Presumably, the two expatriate Florentines sensed a market for the Florentine translation of the ancient text, and took advantage of the patronage of the king of Naples to carry out the printing venture with Venice-based printer Jenson. Landino's preface (or *prohemio*) addressed to King Ferdinand sets out a number of significant points regarding the scope and shared interests underpinning this translation:

conoscendo gran parte degli huomini essere ignari delle latine lettere: hai voluto anchora in questa parte sovvenire a quegli et dare opera che Plinio di latino diventi thoscano et di romano fiorentino acciocché essendo scripto in lingua commune a tutta Italia et a molte externe nationi assai familiare l'opera tua giovi a molti.

knowing that many people do not understand Latin, you wished to bear them again in mind in this matter by providing Pliny's Latin work turned into Tuscan, and from Roman into Florentine, being written in the language used throughout Italy and familiar to many foreign nations, so that your work would be useful to many.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Pliny 1476A. More precisely, Brancati used Landino's version for Book One before moving to Beroaldo's edition. See Gentile 1961, 713.

<sup>41</sup> On Brancati's language in his translation of Pliny's text see Barbato 2001, 22–26.

<sup>42</sup> See de Roover 1953.

<sup>43</sup> Edler De Roover and Ugo Rozzo have put forward this suggestion. See Rozzo 2011, 94–97.

<sup>44</sup> Pliny 1476, 1v.

In this statement, Landino promotes the Florentine language as the most apt vehicle for the dissemination of ancient knowledge beyond the small, elitist, Latinate readership. Such a positive view of the Florentine vernacular is underpinned by Lorenzo de' Medici's promotion of the Florentine language across the Italian peninsula, and more than likely provoked Brancati's counter-translation of Pliny into Neapolitan. The promotion of the Florentine language and translation is framed by Landino as a collaboration between the translator (that is, himself) and the dedicatee. Landino takes for granted that both share the same objective; that is, to make Pliny accessible and useful to a broader readership than ever before.

Another passage from the 1476 printed preface — and a long section that follows — promotes the Aragonese rule that had faced strong opposition from local lords (1459–1462):

certamente nessun sarà o sì ignaro delle cose facte ne' nostri tempi o sì iniquo iudice et stimatore di quelle che non conceda te meritissimamente dovere tra' e' più laudati regi ottenere amplissimo et augusto seggio.

Certainly no one will be so uninformed of current affairs or unjust an evaluator or judge of these as to not admit that you have very much deserved to obtain a very distinguished and an honoured place among the most praised kings.<sup>45</sup>

Here, Landino's praise of King Ferdinand in a lengthy section of the preface is essentially the same as that found in the manuscript version presented to the ruler almost two years before. Having paid Landino 200 ducats for his efforts, the king was still considered deserving of fully fledged praise in the printed version. And in fact his patronage of Landino had not ceased with the alleged failure of the manuscript translation into Tuscan and his subsequent request for a Neapolitan rendition: the Neapolitan king must have recognised the opportunity to promote his rule through the printed translation. Patronage, entrepreneurship and the personal financial gains and prestige of the translator converged in this 1476 edition of Pliny. And the market responded extremely positively, as demonstrated by the numerous extant illuminated copies of this edition, some in parchment.<sup>46</sup>

Jumping a few decades and editions ahead, in 1543 Antonio Brucioli (1486–1566) edited Landino's vernacular translation. Since 1529 Brucioli had been exiled from Florence following the return of the Medici family. He

---

<sup>45</sup> Pliny 1476, 2r.

<sup>46</sup> See for instance Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. G b.6. This copy was Filippo Strozzi's. The illumination and binding were completed in 1483. Other illuminated copies are mentioned by Rozzo 2011, 96. Armstrong 2003, 141–155.

spent most of his career in Venice working as printer, editor, revisor, translator and spy. During the period 1543 to 1545 he sought to establish connections with the Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo I Medici, so as to pave the way for his own return to Florence as an official printer. In 1544 his commentary on St Paul's letters was published in Venice by the Brucioli brothers' press.<sup>47</sup> This work is dedicated to Cosimo I. Brucioli was turning his attention towards the Florentine leader because his own religious ideas were being criticised more and more for their "heretical undertones coming from Germany".<sup>48</sup>

These same years first saw Brucioli editing Landino's translation of the *Natural History* (1543), and then producing a new translation. In the 1543 edition — printed by Gabriele Giolito in Venice — the translation is clearly presented as Landino's. Brucioli is nevertheless named in the title as having edited the text:

nuovamente in molti luoghi, dove quella mancava, supplito, et da infiniti errori emendata, et con somma diligenza corretta per Antonio Brucioli

newly completed in the many places where text was missing, with numerous errors emended, and most diligently corrected by Antonio Brucioli.<sup>49</sup>

The title-page also explains to the reader that this new edition contains a corrected (*castigata*) table of contents, and there have been added "many chapters that did not exist in the other editions" ("aggiuntovi molti capitoli, che nelle altre impressioni non erano").<sup>50</sup> Finally, this new edition of Landino's translation is also furnished with a life of Pliny the Elder, a more thorough index and a glossary of difficult and unknown terms. The provision of a glossary harks back to Landino's own discussion, in his preface to King Ferdinand, of the arduous Latin words found in the *Natural History*.

In his dedication to Gabriele Giolito, Brucioli presents this edition as his gift to his publisher: "I wished to present Pliny's work before you, offering you some of my own emendations" ("Ho voluto il presente libro di Plinio mettervi avanti, dedicandovi alcune mie correzioni fattevi sopra").<sup>51</sup> The collaboration between the Giolito publishing house and Brucioli had been

---

<sup>47</sup> Barbieri 2000. See also Lear 1972.

<sup>48</sup> In 1544, Dominican theologian Ambrogio Catarino condemned Brucioli's vernacular translation and commentary of the *New Testament*. See Barbieri 2000, 714.

<sup>49</sup> Pliny 1543, title-page.

<sup>50</sup> Pliny 1543, title-page.

<sup>51</sup> Pliny 1543, ii.

growing steadily in the years between 1538 and 1543. This collaboration, however, ended abruptly almost immediately after the publication of Landino's translation. The fact that in 1544 the Dominican theologian Ambrogio Catarino had accused Brucioli of heretical ideas, as we have pointed out in note 48, must have played some part in this sudden change, since the theologian was very close to Gabriele Giolito.<sup>52</sup>

What is relevant here is that both Brucioli and the young printer Giolito acknowledged Landino's work as translator. Their 1543 edition of the *Natural History* in Tuscan is presented as a more accurate edition of the 1476 translation printed by Jenson: "translated by Cristoforo Landino and newly completed in the many places where text was missing" ("tradotta per Christophoro Landino, et nuovamente in molti luoghi, dove quella mancava, supplito").<sup>53</sup> This new version is expressly framed as a collaborative work in which the ancient author, the Quattrocento translator, and the Cinquecento editor-translator and printer are visible, or are pointed out to the reader. In other words, the collaborative nature of this translation is claimed to promote the appeal and marketability of the product.

During the sixteenth century, it was extremely common for printers and editors to promote the care taken with newly edited texts, as well as the texts' resultant reliability, especially in connection with a translation of an esteemed ancient work.<sup>54</sup> Even so, in the prefatory material of their 1543 *Natural History*, Brucioli and Giolito do not reveal that, rather than depending on the Florence 1476 edition, they reprinted one published in 1534 by Tommanso Ballarino in Venice.<sup>55</sup> According to its title-page, the earlier 1476 edition had been checked and improved ("in molti luoghi dove quella mancava supplito et da infiniti errori emendata, et con somma diligenza corretta") by one Giovan de Francesio, who also wrote a preface to the reader.<sup>56</sup> Brucioli and Giolito's wholesale reprint of this 1534 edition made good sense in market terms: the more recent edition had already revised and standardised the fifteenth-century text, thus offering a less outdated text in a more normalised Florentine language.

To sum up, Brucioli's 1543 edition reveals the complex negotiations underpinning editorial collaboration in early modern print culture: from the recognition of earlier editors and translators (Landino) to the unacknowledged reprinting of Ballarino's 1534 edition. In this instance, printer and

---

<sup>52</sup> Nuovo & Coppens 2005, 229.

<sup>53</sup> Pliny 1543, title-page.

<sup>54</sup> Richardson 1994, 5 and *passim*.

<sup>55</sup> Richardson 1994, 106–107. Pliny 1534.

<sup>56</sup> Pliny 1534, title-page. Giovan de Francesio's name appears on the page containing the preface to the reader.

editor worked together to promote their work by affirming the literary reputation of the Quattrocento translator while effectively supplanting a ten-year-old edition of the same text.

The story of Brucioli's 1543 edition does not end here. In 1548, Brucioli claimed to have produced a new translation of the *Natural History* in an obvious attempt to supplant Landino's translation and, by corollary, his own previous work as its editor. The 1548 title-page presents the work as "Natural History by C. Pliny the Elder, newly translated from Latin into the Tuscan vernacular by Antonio Brucioli".<sup>57</sup> A first impression suggests that for this edition Brucioli rejected some editorial features present in his 1543 edition: the table of contents and the glossary have been omitted. Furthermore, the 1548 edition contains several new explanatory marginalia concerning the meaning of specific terms.<sup>58</sup> On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that several of these marginal notes are taken almost verbatim from Landino's translation.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, the preface addressed to Leone Strozzi and written by Brucioli in the first person mirrors Landino's preface to King Ferdinand. Both texts praise their dedicatee for his military skills and prowess, and stress their patrons' appreciation of ancient learning and languages.<sup>60</sup> In fact, this publication might be described as a partial and unconfessed or 'covert' merger of two preceding versions of Pliny's text: Landino's translation (from the 1534 edition) and Brucioli's own 1543 printed edition.<sup>61</sup> Somewhat

---

<sup>57</sup> Pliny 1548. The translation is dedicated to Leone Strozzi (1515–1554), an exile from Medicean Florence.

<sup>58</sup> Brambilla 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Brambilla 2011.

<sup>60</sup> Pliny 1548, ii–iii: "Ma finalmente dalla peritia della militare disciplina cominciando, poi che questa appare al mondo, più che questa appare al mondo, più che ogni altra ammirabile, nessuno è che habbia cognitione degli egregii fatti vostri [...] che sempre sia veduto risplendere in voi il valore degli antique et più lodati capitani [...] per la gran virtù et peritia militare, che sempre è stata in voi. [...] Ma che dirò io poi delle lettere grece, et latine, le quali di non altrimenti risplendono in voi che lucerne ardenti sopra allo candeliere d'oro"; Pliny 1476, 4–6: "Qual parte adunque è sì ardua nella militare disciplina la quale per mancamento d'animo tu non habbi adempiuto. [...] Et al presente intendendo quanto sia utile et gioconda la cognitione delle chose scripte in Plinio per farle comuni a quegli che non sanno le latine lettere."

<sup>61</sup> Compare the first lines of Pliny 1476, 15: "DITERMINAI O GIOCONDISSIMO imperadore con epistola forse di troppa licentia narrarti e libri della naturale historia, opera nuova alle muse de tuoi Romani"; Pliny 1534, \* vi: "DITERMINAI O GIOCONDISSIMO IMPERAdore con epistola forse di troppo licentia narrarti e libri della historia naturale: opera novella alle muse romane"; and Pliny 1548, iiiii: "Io ho determinato, giocondissimo imperatore, con epistola, forse di troppo licentia, narrarti i libri della naturale historia, opera novella alle muse romane". The only noticeable difference in Brucioli's 1548 edition is that Brucioli corrects the name of the emperor to whom the preface is addressed: Vespasian instead of Domitian. This mistake had already been fixed in the 1473 Latin edition, as

paradoxically, where the title-page effaces Landino's work as a translator and Brucioli's own previous work as an editor, Brucioli-the-editor-and-publisher placed himself in direct competition with Brucioli-the-translator. However, an expert mid-sixteenth-century reader of Pliny would have easily recognised in this 1548 edition traces of Landino's work and Brucioli's earlier editorial efforts.

A few words should be said about yet another vernacular translation of Pliny's text: Ludovico Domenichi's 1561 rendering of the *Natural History*.<sup>62</sup> In effect, the commercial success of this version made Brucioli's 1548 edition obsolete. Published by Gabriele Giolito, Domenichi's version contains most of the features seen in the 1476 printed version of Landino's translation, and in Brucioli's 1543 edition. Across the densely printed title-page the names of previous translators are duly acknowledged by Domenichi, and earlier translators are excused for their shortcomings, since the Latin texts they had at their disposal were untrustworthy and corrupt:

Assaissimi luoghi sono in Plinio scorretti, et molto mal concii, de' quali nessuno se ne trova restituito, né emendato. Bene è vero, che per essersi Christophoro Landino, huomo secondo quei tempi scientiato et dotto, abbattuto a testi guasti e scorretti [...] Né però mi attribuisco io tanto di sapere, ch'io mi dia a credere d'havere inteso tutto quello, che il Landino prima, e il Brucciolo dopo lui non hanno né veduto né inteso. Perché, si come io ho detto, non dubito punto, che se essi quei buoni et corretti testi havessero havuto, i quali a noi, mercé d'alcuni eccellentissimi, et d'ogni lode degni huomini sono venuti in mano; et molto meglio, et più fedelmente assai, che non si vede, havrebbono tradotto.

Very many places in Pliny are corrupt and in a bad state, none of which have been restored or emended. Truth is that Cristoforo Landino, a very learned and scholarly man of his time, was disheartened by the corrupt readings and errors. [...] However, I do not claim to be more knowledgeable or to have understood everything that, first Landino, then Brucioli, did not see or comprehend. For, as I have already said, I have no doubt that, had they had at their disposal the same fine, corrected texts we have today — thanks to some most excellent and praiseworthy men — they would have translated [Pliny] much better and more faithfully.<sup>63</sup>

---

discussed above, but both Pliny 1534 and Pliny 1543 had repeated the mistake. This error was probably caused by the fact that Landino's translation does not name the emperor.

<sup>62</sup> Pliny 1561. On Domenichi see D'Alessandro 1978, Piscini 1992, and Carrano 2010.

<sup>63</sup> Pliny 1561, aiiii.

As seen in all the editions of the *Natural History* discussed above, the paratext affords various levels of visibility and invisibility to past and contemporary agents involved in the successive editions and translations of Pliny's work. The identities of the author, translators, editors and printers are made explicit for the benefit of the readers and named patron. Domenichi positions his publishing effort as a fine, corrected text in which different authorial and translative stances are acknowledged and reviewed.

### Conclusion

Building on the work of McLaughlin, Hermans, and Deane-Cox concerning the visibility and agency of translators, the present study has shed new light on paratextual posturing by Italian Renaissance translators, editors, and printers across successive editions of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*. In particular, the case study presented in this article shows how Italian Renaissance editors, translators and printers made a practice of collaborating on new editions of ancient texts, and habitually designated this practice in paratextual materials — particularly in their first-person prefaces, if not also on the title-pages of their editions. Collaboration posturing gave visibility to the agents involved in textual production, even when their names did not appear in the text or paratexts. Newer versions or translations did not necessarily exclude earlier ones. Instead, successive versions could involve more roles and could give greater agency to interpreters and readers of an ancient text such as Pliny's.

The collaborative nature of editing and translation revealed here has the potential to challenge current understandings of Renaissance translation. It undermines the perception of humanist translation as a solitary activity in which the intellectual skills of one person were developed, tested and textually displayed. Bruni's influential *On the Correct Way to Translate* deliberately eschews translation as a collaborative and ongoing enterprise. However, successive editions and translations of Pliny's *Natural History* in Quattrocento and Cinquecento Italy reveal how a newly completed translation underscored and openly demanded collaboration from scholars and patrons, who were asked to improve or approve of the work. Furthermore, the editorial and translative practices illustrated in this case study — paratextually represented in ways that evoke an ongoing dialogue across time and place — challenge habitual ideas about the rigid temporal and cultural boundaries between Latin and vernacular cultures in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy.

The successive and collaborative editions and translations of Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* witness the pervasiveness of what Bistué has termed an "unthinkable practice": multi-version texts produced in succession in an

ongoing process of translation, editing and textual positioning.<sup>64</sup> The pervasive collaborative practice in the production of re-editions and re-translations discussed here enhanced, in the Italian Renaissance, opportunities for the visibility of editors, translators and printers. Collaboration also gave visibility to the strategies undertaken by editors, translators and printers to position themselves and their work whether overtly or covertly.<sup>65</sup>

With implications for our understanding of editing and translation today, the key finding of this article is that, collaboration not only was synchronous — for example editor or translators assisting one another while working at the same desk — but it was perceived by Quattrocento and Cinquecento editors and translators as a dialogue across time and place: the textual mobility outlined here collapsed time and, at least in some of the cases examined below, agency. Such a scope of reference for scholars of translation history poses fascinating interpretive challenges: the collaborative, transnational and ‘multimedia’ nature of Renaissance translation requires an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> Bistué 2013, 53, and *passim*.

<sup>65</sup> See note 7 above.

<sup>66</sup> See for instance Pym 2014, 198–199, O’Sullivan 2012, 136, and Hosington 2015, 12.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources (printed)

- Pliny 1469, *Caii Plynii Secundi Naturalis Historia*, Venice [ISTC ip00786000].
- Pliny 1470, *Caii Plynii Secundi Naturalis Historia*, ed.: Andrea Bussi, Rome [ISTC ip00787000].
- Pliny 1472, *Caii Plynii Secundi Naturalis Historiae*, ed.: Andrea Bussi, Venice [ISTC ip00788000].
- Pliny 1473, *C. Plinii Secundi Naturalis Historiae liber primus de his quae singulis libris continentur incipit foeliciter*, Rome [ISTC ip00789000].
- Pliny 1476, *Historia Naturale di C. Plinio Secondo tradotta di lingua Latina in Fiorentina per Christophoro Landino fiorentino al serenissimo Ferdinando Re di Napoli*, Venice [ISTC ip00801000].
- Pliny 1476A, *Plinius Secundus Caius. Historia Naturalis*, Parma [ISTC ip00790000].
- Pliny 1534, *Historia Naturale di C. Plinio Secondo di Latino in volgare tradotta per Christophoro Landino, nuovamente in molti luoghi, dove quella mancava, supplito, et da infiniti errori emendata, et con somma diligenza corretta, con la tavola similmente castigata, et aggiuntovi molti capitoli, che nelle altre impressioni non erano...*, Venice [USTC 849930].
- Pliny 1543, *Historia Naturale di C. Plinio Secondo di Latino in volgare tradotta per Christophoro Landino, et nuovamente in molti luoghi, dove quella mancava, supplito, et da infiniti errori emendata, et con somma diligenza corretta per Antonio Brucioli*, Venice [USTC 849933].
- Pliny 1548, *Historia Naturale di C. Plinio Secondo, nuovamente tradotta di latino in volgare toscano. Per Antonio Brucioli*, Venice [USTC 849934].
- Pliny 1561, *Historia Naturale di G. Plinio Secondo, tradotta per M. Lodovico Domenichi, con le postille in margine [...] all'illustrissimo signore, il Signor Alberigo Cibò Malespina, Marchese di Massa, et S. di Carrara*, Venice [USTC 849937].

### Secondary sources

- Adamo, Sergia 2006, "Microhistory in Translation", *Charting the Future of Translation History*, eds.: George L. Bastin & Paul F. Bandia, Ottawa, 81–100.
- Agno, Franca 1956, "Ancora sui Bestiari del Morgante", *Studi di Filologia Italiana* 14, 485–493.
- Antonazzo, Antonino 2011, "I codici di dedica del volgarizzamento pliniano di Cristoforo Landino: una revisione autografa", *Studi Medievali e Umanistici* 8–9, 343–365.

- Armstrong, Lilian 2003, *Studies of Renaissance Miniaturists in Venice*, London.
- Barbato, Marcello 2001, *Il Libro VIII del Plinio napoletano di Giovanni Brancati*, Naples.
- Barbieri, Edoardo 2000, “Tre schede per Antonio Brucioli e alcuni suoi libri”, *Aevum* 74,3, 709–719.
- Biow, Douglas 2015, *On the Importance of Being an Individual in Renaissance Italy. Men, their Profession, and their Beards*, Philadelphia.
- Bistué, Belén 2013, *Collaborative Translation and Multi-Version Texts in Early Modern Europe*, Farnham.
- Bistué, Belén 2017, “On the Incorrect Way to Translate: The Absence of Collaborative Translation from Leonardo Bruni’s *De interpretatione recta*”, *Collaborative Translation. From the Renaissance to the Digital Age*, eds.: Anthony Cordingley & Céline Frigau Manning, London & New York, 33–48.
- Brambilla, Simona 2011, “Antonio Brucioli curator e traduttore di Plinio”, *Archives Internationales d’Histoire des Sciences* 61, 163–174.
- Bussi, Giovanni Andrea 1978, *Prefazioni alle edizioni di Sweynheym e Pannartz prototipografi romani* ed.: Massimo Miglio, Milan (*Documenti sulle arti del libro* 12).
- Cardini, Roberto 1973, *La critica del Landino*, Florence.
- Carrano, Gabriella 2010, “Lodovico Domenichi volgarizzatore di Plutarco: La violazione del codice musaico nel classicismo/eteroclassicismo di un eclettico poligrafo”, *Misure Critiche* 1, 4–63.
- Carver, Robert H. F. 2007, *The Protean Ass. The Metamorphoses of Apuleius from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, Oxford & New York.
- Charlet, Jean-Louis 1999, “La lettre de N. Perotti à Francesco Guarnieri: un commentaire à la Préface de Pline qui annonce le *Cornu copiae*”, *Studi Umanistici Piceni* 19, 38–46.
- Charlet, Jean-Louis 2003a, “Une querelle au sein de la Res Publica Litterarum: la question de Pline l’Ancien de 1469 au milieu du XVIème siècle”, *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Cantabrigiensis. Proceedings of the Eleventh International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies*, Cambridge 30 July–5 August 2000, ed.: Rhoda Schnur, Tempe (*Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 259), 7–21.
- Charlet, Jean-Louis 2003b, *Deux pièces de la controverse humaniste sur Pline: N. Perotti, Lettre à Guarnieri, C. Vitelli, Lettre à Partenio di Salò. Édition critique et commentaire*, Sassoferato.
- Charlet, Jean-Louis 2011, “Niccolò Perotti, Humaniste du Quattrocento: Bibliographie critique”, *Niccolò Perotti: The Languages of Humanism and Politics*. Contributions from the conference ‘Un umanista romano del

- secondo Quattrocento* held at the Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo and the Danish Academy in Rome, 4–5 June 2009, eds.: Marianne Pade & Camilla P. Horster (*Renaissanceforum* 7, [www.renaissanceforum.dk](http://www.renaissanceforum.dk)), 1–72.
- Coldiron, Anne E. B. 2012, “Visibility Now: Historicizing Foreign Presences in Translation”, *Translation Studies* 5,2, 189–200.
- D’Alessandro, Alessandro 1978, “Prime ricerche su Lodovico Domenichi”, *Le corti farnesiane di Parma e Piacenza, 1545–1622*, ed.: Amedeo Quondam, Rome (*Biblioteca del Cinquecento* 1-2), 171–200.
- D’Alessandro, Paolo 2015, “Perotti, Niccolò”, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ad vocem.
- Deane-Cox, Sharon 2014, *Retranslation: Translation, Literature and Re-interpretation*, London.
- de Roover, Florence Edler 1953, “Come furono stampati a Venezia tre dei primi libri in volgare”, *Bibliofilia* 55,2, 107–117.
- Del Soldato, Eva 2012, “*Illa litteris Graecis abdita*: Bessarion, Plato, and the Western World”, *Translatio Studiorum. Ancient Medieval and Modern Bearers of Intellectual History*, ed.: Marco Sgarbi, Leiden & Boston, 109–122.
- Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 1960–, eds.: alii, Rome.
- Egerton, Clement (trans.) 1939, *The Golden Lotus. A Translation, from the Chinese original, of the novel Chin P’ing Mei*, 4 vols., London.
- Feld, Maury D. 1988, “The First Roman Printers and the Idioms of Humanism. An Introduction”, *Harvard Library Bulletin* 36,1, 9–34.
- Fera, Vincenzo 1995, “Un laboratorio filologico di fine Quattrocento: la *Naturalis historia*”, *Formative Stages of Classical Traditions: Latin texts from Antiquity to the Renaissance*, eds.: Oronzo Pecere & Michael D. Reeve, Spoleto, 435–66
- Fubini, Riccardo 1995, “Cristoforo Landino, le ‘Disputationes Camaldulenses’ e il volgarizzamento di Plinio: Questioni di cronologia e di interpretazione”, *Studi in onore di Arnaldo d’Addario*, eds.: Luigi Borgia, Francesco de Luca & Raffaella M. Zaccaria, Lecce (*Attraverso la storia* 1), 535–560.
- Gentile, Salvatore 1961, *Postille ad una recente edizione di testi narrativi napoletani del ’400*, Naples.
- Hankins, James 2006, “Humanism in the Vernacular: The Case of Leonardo Bruni”, *Humanism and Creativity in the Renaissance. Essays in Honor of Ronald G. Witt*, eds.: Christopher S. Celenza & Kenneth Gouwens, Leiden & Boston, 11–29.
- Hermans, Theo 2014, “Positioning Translators: Voices, Views and Values in Translation”, *Language and Literature* 23,3, 285–301.

- Hosington, Brenda M. 2015, "Translation and Print Culture in Early Modern Europe", *Renaissance Studies* 29,1, 5–18.
- Inghilleri, Moira 2005/2014, "Mediating Zones of Uncertainty. Interpreter Agency, the Interpreting Habitus and Political Asylum Adjudication", *The Translator* 11,1, 69–85.
- Landino, Cristoforo 1974, *Scritti critici e teorici*, ed.: Roberto Cardini, Rome.
- Lear, RR. N. 1972, "Brucioli, Antonio", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ad vocem.
- Marcelli, Nicoletta 2011, "La 'Naturalis Historia' di Plinio nel volgarizzamento di Cristoforo Landino", *Archives internationales d'histoire des sciences* 61, 137–161.
- McLaughlin, Mairi 2008, "(In)visibility: Dislocation in French and the Voice of the Translator", *French Studies* 62,1, 53–64.
- Monfasani, John 1988, "The First Call for Press Censorship: Niccolò Perotti, Giovanni Andrea Bussi, Antonio Moreto, and the Editing of Pliny's 'Natural History'", *Renaissance Quarterly* 41,1, 1–31.
- Monfasani, John 2011, "Niccolò Perotti and Bessarion's *In Calumniatorem Platonis*", *Niccolò Perotti: The Languages of Humanism and Politics*. Contributions from the conference 'Un umanista romano del secondo Quattrocento' held at the Istituto storico italiano per il medio evo & the Danish Academy in Rome, 4–5 June 2009, eds.: Marianne Pade & Camilla P. Horster (*Renaissanceforum* 7, [www.renaissanceforum.dk](http://www.renaissanceforum.dk)), 181–216.
- Nuovo, Angela & Christian Coppens 2005, *I Giolito e la stampa nell'Italia del XVI secolo*, Geneve.
- O'Sullivan, Carol 2012, "Rethinking Methods in Translation History", *Translation Studies* 5,2, 131–138.
- Passarelli, Maria Antonietta 2003, "L' 'horologio' della 'Naturalis Historia': Giovanni Brancati contro Cristoforo Landino", *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 67, 109–141.
- Peterson, Anna 2006, "Translation as editing?", *World literature Today* 80,6, 51–54.
- Piscini, Angela 1992, "Domenichi, Ludovico", *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, ad vocem.
- Pym, Anthony 2014, *Method in Translation History*, Abingdon, Oxon.
- Pym, Anthony 2016, *Translation Solutions for Many Languages: Histories of a Flawed Dream*, London.
- Richardson, Brian 1994, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge.
- Richardson, Brian 2009, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy*, Cambridge & New York.

- Rizzi, Andrea 2016, “Violent Language in Early Fifteenth-century Italy: The Emotions of Invectives”, *Violence and Emotions in Early Modern Europe*, eds.: Susan Broomhall & Sarah Finn, Abingdon, Oxon., 145–158.
- Rizzi, Andrea 2017, *Vernacular Translators in Quattrocento Italy: Scribal Culture, Authority, and Agency*, Turnhout.
- Rizzo, Silvia 1973, *Il lessico filologico degli umanisti*, Rome.
- Roberts, Sean 2014, *Printing a Mediterranean World: Florence, Constantinople, and the Renaissance of Geography*, Cambridge, MA.
- Rozzo, Ugo 2011, “La fortuna della *Naturalis Historia* di Plinio nell’editoria del XV secolo”, *Archives Internationales d’Histoire des Sciences* 61, 73–113.
- Sabbadini, Remigio 1900, “Le edizioni quattrocentesche della S. N. di Plinio”, *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 8, 439–448.
- Terpening, Ronnie 1997, *Lodovico Dolce, Renaissance Man of Letters*, Toronto.
- Trovato, Paolo 2009, *Con ogni diligenza corretto: La stampa e le revisioni editoriali dei testi letterari italiani (1470–1570)*, Ferrara.
- Venuti, Lawrence, 1995/2008, *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*, London.
- Wolf, Michaela & Alexandra Fukari (eds.) 2007, *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia.