

COMPTES RENDUS

Leonardo Bruni. *De interpretatione recta. De la traduction parfaite.* Traduction du latin, introduction et notes de Charles Le Blanc. Ottawa, Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2008, 132 p.

This new, elegant, French translation of *De interpretatione recta*, a pioneering work by Florentine Leonardo Bruni written between 1420 and 1426 and considered to be the first modern treatise on the theory of translation, as well as a “manifesto” of humanist culture, is timely in that Bruni reflects on questions and issues that still concern and perplex translation scholars. The publication also reminds translators, especially literary translators, of the importance of striving to re-capture or restore not only the meaning but also the essential stylistic elements of the original. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of current postmodern thinking, as it impacts on Translation Studies, especially in its tendency to suggest that it is not possible to reproduce the source text in the totality of its structural and semantic complexity, and that every translation is only an interpretation, one in a virtually endless series of possible readings. While conceding that there are limits to the attainment of what may appear to be an antiquated objective, that of complete fidelity to the source text, Bruni nonetheless argues that it is the responsibility of the translator to try to achieve that elusive goal.

Le Blanc's French translation, with the original Latin facing, includes an indispensable introduction, a concise biography, and ample endnotes that provide translations of phrases left in the original Greek, comments on various aspects of Bruni's procedures, and very useful explanations of references to Latin and Greek texts, intertexts that might escape the reader not entirely familiar with Renaissance or classical scholarship. Le Blanc acknowledges his indebtedness to *Sulla perfetta traduzione*, Paolo Vito's Italian translation (Napoli, Liguori, 2004), stating: “Cette édition du traité *De interpretatione recta* fut conduite à partir de celle établie par Paolo Vito qui, à ce jour, offre l'analyse la plus minutieuse de cet ouvrage dans l'importante œuvre humaniste de Leonardo Bruni” (pp. 16-17). In addition, Le Blanc has relied

on *Leonardo Bruni Aretino Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe*, edited by H. Baron (Leipzig-Berlin, Teubner, 1928).

In his Introduction, Le Blanc places Bruni's treatise within the context of the renewed interest for Antiquity in Renaissance Florence, especially the humanists' desire to understand more precisely and thoroughly the classical authors, hence the need for philological rigour. Philology and translation are seen as indispensable to that pursuit and as interdependent instruments in the recovery of the full meaning of classical texts. Le Blanc writes: "[...] on peut affirmer qu'il y a un *continuum* entre le changement d'esprit manifesté par les humanistes à l'égard de l'Antiquité et de ses textes, et la nécessité de circonscrire des critères philologiques précis dans l'établissement des manuscrits, en particulier dans l'élaboration de règles pour la conduite des traductions" (p. 4). Bruni and his contemporaries assumed that philological precision assured the truthfulness of the translated text, fidelity to the source text, re-appropriation of the original text and author, and, most importantly for Renaissance intellectuals, rediscovery of the self, since it was believed at the time that one is what one reads.

Bruni himself provides an outline of his brief treatise: "[...] je t'exposerai d'abord ce que je pense de la traduction, puis je t'illustrerai les critiques qu'à bon droit j'ai faites. Enfin, en troisième lieu, je montrerai qu'en reprenant ses erreurs, j'ai suivi la méthode des hommes les plus doctes" (p. 29). The translator whose work he addresses throughout the treatise is Roberto Grossatesta, who had published his own translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* prior to Bruni's version of 1417, in the Preface of which Bruni criticized the defects in Grossatesta's rendition. *De interpretatione recta* is, in part, a justification of his attacks and a fuller articulation of his ideas on effective translation, ideas expressed in partial form in the Prefaces of several of Bruni's Latin versions of Greek texts, including those of Plato and Aristotle.

As Le Blanc points out and as is evident from Bruni's own remarks, at the core of the ideas expressed here on translation theory and practice, is Leonardo Bruni's admiration for the classical authors that, in his view, must be translated "correctly" or "perfectly," so that the essence, the true qualities of their works, obscured by neglectful or incompetent medieval translators, can be brought back to light, "car ces livres qui, en grec, sont pleins d'élégance, ces ouvrages qui regorgent de douceurs et qui débordent de je ne sais quelle pudeur inestimable, se révélaient en latin salis par le fait des souillures de cette traduction" (p. 27). For Bruni, the works of Plato and Aristotle, as canonical texts, are lucid, beautifully constructed literary works comparable to the masterpieces of such artists as Apelles.

Given his intention, as a humanist, to revive, to the extent possible, the fullness of the original Greek text, Bruni emphasizes the absolute necessity of perfect command of both Greek and Latin, as well as of the rhetorical resources available in both languages. Bruni rejects as insufficient a linguistically accurate rendering of the source text in favour of a translation based on three principles: aesthetics, linguistics, and hermeneutics. By this, Bruni means to say that the beauty of the original must be preserved, that the target language must be based on a model derived from the works of the best writers, and that the translation must produce in the reader the effect that the original had on its audience. In other words, the ideal is a translation that reads as though it were the original. Indeed, much to the dismay of post-structuralist proponents of the death of the author, Bruno argues that the translator must identify completely with the thought and the culture of the author; that is, he must be the Model or Ideal Reader.

In his treatise, Leonardo Bruni does not merely theorize in the abstract; he also identifies linguistic errors and awkward terms in Grossatesta's Latin rendering of the works of Plato and Aristotle, and he provides convincing alternatives that appear to be much closer to the source text. In the process, Bruni formulates important distinctions between literal and free translation, while demonstrating that much is lost when the stylistic elements of the

original are ignored, poorly understood, or badly translated. As Bruni has captured the style and meaning of the works of Plato and Aristotle in his Latin equivalents, Le Blanc has captured the spirit and the letter of Bruni's Latin in his impeccable French translation.

Corrado Federici
BROCK UNIVERSITY