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Compte rendu

Roger Ellis and René Tixier (eds.), *The Medieval Translator. Traduire au Moyen Âge*. Proceeding of the International conference of Conques..Vol. 5. Brepols, Belgium, 1996. xvi + 488 pp.

The papers collected in this volume cover a wide range of texts, nationalities, and especially, interpretations of translation, and is not limited to translations undertaken in the Middle Ages (a period which itself is interpreted generously) but includes some contributions on modernisations of medieval works, and on "translation" in a non-literary sense.

In the last-named category is 'The Translations of Foy' by *Kathleen Ashley* and *Pamela Sheingorn*, who in a study of Sainte Foy distinguish (1) the transfer of the saint's remains, (2) the transfer of thoughts from note-form to full text, possibly linked to the translation of oral accounts in the vernacular into written Latin, (3) the appropriation of the cult by the aristocracy, and (4) translation in the sense of "mediation", with Foy herself cited as an example of "faithful translator" between earthly suppliants and God. In her paper 'Translating Saints' Lives into the Vernacular' *Florence Bourgne* looks at three (English and French) translations from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and finds initially that they conform to the model of *translatio studii*, for example in their insistence on authority and in their link with a spatial transfer of knowledge. But Bourgne then argues against such an identification, suggesting from an analysis of treatments of St Margaret that the authors' desire to amplify and "concretise" the source is more akin to *inventio* or even *furta sacra*, the relocation of saints' remains for the common good. Less relevant to the general theme of translation is *Rosalynn Voaden's* 'Women's Words, Men's Language', which discusses the concept of *discreto spirituum*, the skill is discerning true visions which was instrumental in the process of canonisation of visionaries. Because *discretio spirituum* was a discourse dominated by men, Voaden argues that women visionaries involved in the writing or editing of their visions consciously "translated" their experience and their language into the masculine discourse. Translation as a shifting between levels of discourse is likewise the subject of *Gloria Cigman's* 'Comoun Mater and Hier Witt', which analyses a number of

Lollard sermons–some of them incorporating translations from the bible and Church Fathers–to show how the sermon-writer(s) pitched their commentaries at a level appropriate to the knowledge and understanding of the audience.

On the basis of his study of the German D-translation of the *Visiones Georgii* ('Latin Adaptation and German Translation'), *Bernd Weitemeier* makes a plea for a new assessment of the vernacular versions generally, which he argues may not have undertaken arbitrary abridgements and omissions, but have faithfully followed abridged Latin redactions. He also questions the traditional notion that German versions may have been read only by educated laymen, while Latin versions remained the preserve of the clerics. In 'The Translator and the Text of the Old English *Genesis B, Colette Stévanovitch* compares sections of the translation with the original Old Saxon fragment and shows how features of the latter's style (rhythm, envelope patterns, wordplay) have been adapted with some success, even if (in the case of envelope patterns) they may not have been understood, or (in the case of wordplay) they may be the result of closeness to the original. In the context of the broader discourse on translation theory *Brenda B. Hosington* ('Proverb Translation as Linguistic and Cultural Transfer') looks at the treatment of proverbs in four Middle English versions of French romances. She considers not only the accuracy and manner of treatment (how freely are the proverbs adapted), but also how they are embedded in the texts. The very high frequency with which proverbs are simply omitted in the target language deserves further analysis. 'The style of the First English Translation of the *Imitatio Christi'*, by *Brendan Biggs*, compares the English version with its Latin source under three heads, vocabulary, syntax, and rhetoric, and uses statistics effectively to substantiate the initial impression the translation is a close one without being overly Latinate. Since only four English manuscripts survive, however, against 17 of English origin in Latin, its "success" and "effectiveness" (202) must remain a matter of opinion.

In 'Approximations phoniques et glissements sémantiques dans quelques chansons de troubadour francisées' *Chantal Phan* examines some examples of songs in Manuscript W whose original Provençal form has been "translated" into Northern French. The adaptation process involves some semantic changes but also a surprisingly faithful rendering of rhyme

scheme and alliterations; it is clear that for the scribes copying and adapting the texts the musicality of the final version was a greater concern than its grammatical accuracy and logic. *Thomas G. Duncan's* 'Poetry by Accident?' analyses four Middle English versions of Latin religious songs and argues that in one case the modern editor goes too far in making emendations on the basis of metrical requirements. In the others, however, Duncan suggest that comparison with the Latin text throws up several possible corruptions by scribes which should be corrected in future editions. One of the more substantial contributions is *Domenico Pezzini's* 'Late Medieval Translations of Marian Hymns and Antiphons', which combines comments on the appropriateness of the term "translation" (some of the later English versions being independent amplifications linked only tenuously to the original) with observations on the development of Marian ideology generally and on the causes and effects of translation activity in the different cultural climate after the twelfth century. There is a similar focus in *Denis Renevey's* 'Anglo-Norman and Middle English Translation and Adaptations of the Hymn *Dulcis Iesu Memoria*', which uses Wilmart's definitive Latin text of the hymn as a base from which to explore vernacular versions and their contribution to the cause of the Name of Christ. Since it is not always clear if the translations analysed derive from this text, however, some caution is called for. Again there are some interesting observations on the process of adaptation to changing liturgical contexts.

Among the contributions dealing with modern versions of medieval works is 'Bussy-Rabutin and the Abelard-Heloise Correspondence' by *Leslie C. Brook*, which gives us a refreshing insight into an example of recreative translation by a talented and perhaps unduly neglected seventeenth-century stylist. By allowing his own poetic instincts, rather than scholarly diligence, to guide him, Rabutin successfully transposed the twelfth-century heroes in the elegant aristocratic world of his contemporaries. 'La cohérence discursive et le témoignage des traductions' by *Michèle Goyens* analyses the use of the concessives "toutefois", "cependant" and "néanmoins" in a modern French and an Old French translation of two Ciceronian texts. Among the results of the study, which will possibly be of interest to linguists as well as to medievalists, is the fact that both medieval and modern translators sometimes feel the need for an explicit marker where the Latin text has none. A less

scientific study is 'La traduction impossible' by Pierre Demarolle, who compares three modern (French, Polish, and Portuguese) translations of François Villon's *Testament* to illustrate the limitations of various approaches.

Brian Donaghey provides a survey of 'The Post-Medieval English Translations of the *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius, 1500-1800', complete with a useful appendix. The statistics illustrate the untypical situation in Britain compared with the rest of Europe, and Donaghey's study traces the changes in perception of Boethius which led to an increase in translations, especially from the seventeenth century, and to the appearance also of versions in Latin and then English verse. In 'Theory and Practice of Chaucerian Modernisations in Eighteenth Century Britain' *Tetsuko Nakamura* briefly sketches the development of modernised versions of Chaucer before focusing on George Ogle's *Clerk's Tale*, a composite based on Chaucer, Boccaccio and Petrarch which humanises Gualtherus and allows Griselda more independence. *Michel Lemoine's* 'La tradition indirecte du Platon latin' has perhaps least relevance to translation studies, addressing rather the question of medieval access to Plato. It distinguishes "traditions antiques", those with direct access to Plato, especially Cicero, "auteurs chrétiens" and "néo-platoniciens latins", with Martianus Capella, Calcidius, Macrobius and Boethius the last to have such direct access. In 'L'*Esope* de Marie de France' *Sahar Amer* challenges both the notion that Marie's version is simply a translation of the *Romulus Nilantii*, and the assumption of a basic didactic purpose for the fable. Instead of the designation "traduction" Amer suggests "translation" in the context of *translatio studii*.

Joan B. Williamson, 'Philippe de Mézières as Creative Translator', sketches the background to and rationale of Philippe's late fourteenth-century documentation, in Latin and French, of his new Order of Chivalry, before looking in detail at the relationship between texts in the two languages. Philippe emerges as a creative translator, ranging from close adherence to the original, to considerable paraphrase. He is also typical of the privileged position enjoyed by translators under his patron Charles V. In 'L'Énigme du *Prologue du Conte de l'Homme de loi' Juliette Dor* addresses once again the relationship between the *Prologue* and Innocent III's *De miseria condicionis humane*, a relationship suggested also

by Chaucer himself in his *Prologue* to *The Legend of Good Women.* A close analysis of the two texts reveals their affinity, but also some divergences; Dor argues that in rendering Innocent III Chaucer may well have turned to his own *Tale of Melibee*, itself a translation of a text by Renaut de Louhans. Another contribution on Chaucer, '"Awak!": Chaucer Translates Bird Song' by *Leonard Michael Koff*, is among the most substantial in the volume, and certainly one which ranges widest. The title is the starting-point for observations on a medieval philosophy of language (and pre-linguistic communication), Chaucer's choice of vernacular, Rousseau, Chaucer's attitude to "translation" in various senses, and Phoebus' crow as glosser and as silencer in the *Manciple's Tale.*

'"Your Humble Suget and Seruytoure": John Shirley, Transcriber and Translator', by *Margaret Connolly*, provides a useful introduction to the life and three works of translation of this Middle English collector and scribe. By comparing his versions with the sources, known for only two works, Connolly shows how Shirley's (unacknowledged) amplifications and additions cast doubt on his reliability in the historical *Dethe of the Kynge of Scotis*, and also in the works he transcribed. *Jennifer R. Goodman's* 'A Saracen Princess in Three Translations' compares versions in English (Caxton), Spanish, and German of the popular fifteenth-century *Fierabras* by Jean Bagnyon, with the major focus on the treatment of the heroine Floripas. Caxton's version emerges as the closest, the German version the most restrained, and the Spanish the most innovative. In 'The Price of Alfonso's Wisdom' *Anthony Pym* questions many of the assumptions often made about the extent, purpose, and effect of Alfonso's translation policy in thirteenth-century Castile. It is a careful, thoughtful essay which sees a link between the myths on the one hand and on the other, the realities of translation sponsorship in the modern world.

Most readers of this volume will welcome the fact that there is no attempt to coerce the contributors into the straightjacket of a narrow "conference theme". There is something of interest here for scholars of history and literature as well as for translators and translation theorists. Each contribution is preceeded by a summary, mostly in English for papers in French and vice versa, although the principle is not always followed (130, 337); occasionally these summaries do not fully summarise, but read more like a preliminary submission of the

paper, before it has been fully worked out. The volume is very tidily produced, with only occasional lapses in editing (327), and includes two excellent Introductions by the editors as well as notes on the contributors, a Select Bibliography, and an extensive Index.

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