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Compte rendu

The Medieval Translator. Ed. by Roger Ellis & Rend Tixier.
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xvi, 488.

If anyone needs a demonstration of how diverse a phenonemon translation is, this collection of papers given at the Fourth Cardiff Conference on Medieval Translation held at Conques (Aveyron) in July 1993 will furnish it. In many ways it is an odd book to turn up on the reviewer's desk for a periodical like this one. The book is concerned with translation as a fact of culture, rather than as linguistic techniques or behaviour. The tapestry this book covers is far richer than mere scientific investigation of language. By the nature of the Conference most of the papers are concerned with translation into medieval vernaculars, mainly English and French. But the texts covered range from administrative translation, through literature to religion. And the concerns of the conference include the nature of translation itself, the task of the medieval translator and his place in literate medieval society. These conferences have always included some papers on the problems medieval texts pose later translators, in particular our own. But this is the first time that these papers have been included in the Conference proceedings; and it is a welcome inclusion.

After a list of the participants there follow two discursive introductions by Roger Ellis and René Tixier, the papers themselves, a select bibliography and an index which is predominantly an *index nominum.* The languages of the book are French and English, and each paper is preceded by an abstract in the other language. Ellis's introduction is in part a guided tour of the papers in the book and their theoretical implications, while Tixier's profers some musings on the medieval translator's task and its kinship to present day concerns. Both editors send the reader into the book with the firm injunction that one must expect a wide spectrum of behaviour among medieval translators. The writers' bibliographies have been assembled into one bibliography at the end of the book, and there is a good index.

The four articles on translation of medieval material into post-Renaissance languages all illustrate that translation is a confrontation of two universes of meaning rather than just

producing one text more or less equivalent to another. Pierre Demarolle worries about the problems of translating the raffish world of Villon's *Testament* into 20th-century Polish and Brazilian Portuguese. There is some flavour, probably unintentional, of Yves Bonnefoy on the problems of translating Shakespeare in this article. On argumentation not unlike Bonnefoy's–he does not argue from linguistic grounds, but on the grounds of cultural and cognitive mismatch–Demarolle comes to the normal conclusion that the translations he is discussing demonstrate the impossibility of the task. Brian Donaghey traces the twists and turns of the translations of Boethius's *Consolatio,* many of them, particularly in the religious persecutions of the 16th century and the Civil War of the 1640s, informed by parallels many translators saw between themselves and Boethius, an important man in prison consoling himself by philosophy. Boethius's Platonism becomes various brands of Christianity, coloured by the century of the translator. The 1687 translation of the letters of Abelard and Héloise by the disgraced French nobleman, Roger de Rabutin, is presented as a copybook example of *les belles infidèles* by Leslie Brook. Rabutin was known as a graceful prose-writer, and it is clear from this article that his care for the niceties of French style entailled all the social sensitivities proper to the French nobility: the two lovers become two French nobles indulging in a proper amorous correspondence rather than in a double out-pouring of emotion. Brook's article is particularly interesting for his pithy summing-up of Rabutin's philosophy of translation and for his short account of the legacy left by this translation, recreation though it was. In like manner Tetsuko Nakamura looks at an eighteenth-century enthusiast for Chaucer, George Ogle, who was the first to publish a 'modernised' version of the complete *Canterbury Tales.* The article traces the influence on Ogle of the Clerk's Tale as told by Boccaccio and Petrarch, of Dryden's modernisation of Chaucer's version. The result described is a Chaucer filtered through an l8th-century reasonableness who would not recognise himself.

The dominant issue in the exploration of translation in the Middle Ages themselves is the meaning of the term 'translatio'. One is often reminded that translation was a rhetorical craft, and not a division of the science of grammar. Transmission of themes and texts was the central responsibility of the medieval translator. Thus it is that the body of this book begins with that favourite game which medieval scholars played in deadly earnest,

etymology. And like the medievals our authors do not look for the historical origin of the word, but for a conceptual origin that shows the truth the word *translation* embodied. Its concrete sense of bodily transfer of goods or people, and the legal meaning of the transfer of responsibility over goods and profit from them from one person to another were powerful parallels for the medieval *translatio studii*. While the word means translation from one language to another as early as the classical period, translators discussed in this book stretch the meaning of the word to include the movement of information and styles between oral and written tradition, moving between learned and unlearned registers. It also includes writing up rough notes and preparing material for publication.

In his own way each writer in the collection makes it clear that the medieval translator was juggling Demarolle's 'cognitive universes'. I find it odd that Leonard Koff on Chaucer's talking birds makes no mention of those medieval grammarian-philosophers who do write on animal communication, if only to dismiss them as beside his point. Animal language is not the *vox litterata et articulata* of human language; and those commentators on Lombard's *Sententiae* who discuss instances like the serpent speaking in the Garden of Eden, put this uncharacteristic behaviour down to supernatural influence. Koff hints that some medievals shared the Heideggerian view of language as the House of Being, which is stretching things a little. But in relating the properly functional language of Chaucer's birds to the 14th-century recognition that vernaculars could do most, if not all, of the things Latin could do, Koff does show how Chaucer sees translation as revelation of the hidden meaning of word or thing, as gloss on events as well as words, or as interpretation skewed by what one wants to believe. These three themes, incidentally, appear medieval theological commentators.

The translation of the relics of Sainte Foy from Agen to Conques in the ninth century occasioned other acts of translation. Bernard of Angers, a Gascon, took down the original rather racy legends from the locals, who spoke the *langue d'oc*. Whether he took them in Latin or in Gascon, this entailled translation. Then as later writers popularised the cult of Sainte Foy in Northern France, they played down her reputation as a trickster, and made her into a saint fit for the ladies of the parish. For Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn, these adaptations are all changes in concept and therefore acts of translation. We see something the same in Florence Bourgne's account of the fourteenth-century French and English

versions of the legend of St Margaret's encounter with the devil. She explores this *translatio studii* as *furtum sacrurn* (sacred theft). This was a common practice by which a region which felt itself at some disadvantage in relation to God changed the odds by stealing the relics of a saint from some other region, or at times from a local shrine. The original text can be seen as a shrine reserved for somebody else, so that the popularised French and English versions take on the guise of theft. The author's discussion of the iconography of the translations is of particular interest in her argument: these illustrations enhanced the transfer of the saint and her travails to the lay reader. It is a pity that the author did not mention the parallel concept in early Christianity, in which pagan learning was bent to Christian uses by the principle of *spolia Aegypti,* by which the departing Israelites relieved the Egyptians of as much of their riches as they could.

There were also changes in the opposite direction, from popular to official. Rosalynn Voaden's account of visionary writings touches on some of the problems attending the clerical caution, almost suspicion, of lay writings on religious experience, particularly if such writings came from women. She argues, rightly I think, that in his role as translator, the spiritual director of the woman visionary had two major tasks. One was attempting to determine whether these visions were genuine revelations, the other was accustoming their penitents to the proper form of discourse for such matters. Official and lay acceptance of such visions depended largely on the way they were recorded. Bernd Weitemeier on the Late Medieval German version of the *Visiones Georgii,* raises other problems beside those of translation, ita acceptability and its accuracy. Because medieval manuscript transmission was chancy, at best, few medieval translators could rely on a sound original. Therefore many variant readings in translations are to be traced to corruptions. Weitemeier shows that texts like the *Visiones Georgii* and the others discussed above could have had a lay readership in their Latin versions, with consequent effects on contemporary text editing. These four articles take 'translation' in a very wide sense; they show that transfer from one language to another, or from popular to learned registers, entails radical changes in cognitive universe.

Saints' Lives and visionary writings are important examples of the essential distinction drawn by Domenico Pezzini between theology and spirituality. Only a few believers are theologians; all believers have some contact with spirituality. Pezzini situates

his Marian antiphons and hymns and Denis Renevey the *Jesu dulcis memoria* in the growth of a more affective spirituality during the early 13th century. They discuss the translation techniques and the hermeneutics involved with some care. I would, however, have liked to see more contextualisation of these translations in the 12th-century changes in the Monasteries and the Parish liturgy, and in the use of the *Primer* by literate layfolk. What, for instance, is the connection of these versions with the interlinear psalm versions we find in monastic office-books for the use of the almost Latinless? I find myself wondering how the fairly free translation we see in some of these hymns is related to the 'moralised' versions of poets like Ovid. Is there any relation to the trope, which was very common in the liturgical music of the period? One other question that rises from Renevey's article is this: why is it that most of the versions of *Jesu dulcis memoria* quoted fit the Gregorian melody of the hymn? The answer may lie in a throw-away line in Pezzini's article, that some of these translations were meant to be sung, not merely in Church but also by minstrels.

Transmitting technical theology in popular guises is still an important part of the preacher's task, and, because a large part of it was in Latin, such transmission can be termed translation, in both the linguistic sense and the medieval *translatio studii.* Gloria Cigman details how medieval preachers drew on a wide range of material to explicate sermons on Sacred Scripture for the laity. She is right, I think, in ascribing her sermon collection to the Lollards–the commitment to popular education and the range of authorities–from Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, to Isidore of Seville–demonstrated by the writers of her collection would indicate as tm. There is something similar in Juliette Dor's account of Chaucer's Prologue to the Man of Law's Tale. By examining the claim that parts of it were translated from the *De miseria conditionis humanae* of Pope Innocent III (ca.1195), she sketches a tortuous line of transmission through Chaucer's own mining of this tract in other works. Michel Lemoine traces a more orthodox type of *translatio studii,* the excerpting of the Latin Plato in medieval texts. Important though he was, few translations of a complete work by Plato were made before the 16th century, and medieval writings quote him from the Fathers of the Church. The result is a very incomplete view of his philosophy. Three valuable articles which show how tenuous the boundary was between religious and secular literature, learning and their techniques.

Sahar Amer on the *Ésope* of Marie de France, and Jennifer Goodman on what happened to the formidable Saracen princess, Foripas, at the hands of French, English, Spanish and German translators in the 15th and early 16th centuries both show that secular translators had the same habit of adapting to the cultural habits of the readership by reinventing the source text. Because Marie de France worked from the Latin, she is actually translating a translation. Amer doubts whether one can really call these translations, and details the way in which the direction of the Latin fables is changed in the French. However, in demonstrating that Marie's translations conform to the conventions of the medieval French fable, she falls into the same line of argument already used by the writers on religious translation. We see the same sort of change in Foripas, who is a picaresque figure: beautiful, Christian converted from Islam, well-educated, tough and ruthless. Each of her translators moulds her into a different image fitting the cultural expectations of the reader. The translator has become go-between.

The major focus of the block of articles on linguistic issues is the relationship between the purpose of the translator and the techniques he uses. Several of our writers raise the question of 'literal translation', not in the sense of word-for-word matching, but in Antoine Berman's sense of the close translation that reveals the original underneath, a concept that goes back through Meschonnic to Goethe. Berman's contention that close translation enriches the target language by a dose of the foreign plays an important part in Brenda Hosington's article on translating proverbs in Old French Romances raises the same issue. There she describes the translators' somewhat random choices between literal translation of proverbs to completely free dynamic equivalence where the folk wisdom of one language is expressed in another in the same words. Another important issue to the medieval vernacular translator was building rhetorical shape in languages taken as inferior to that of the source. Brendan Biggs makes the point that spiritual writing needs a strong rhetorical structure to be effective. His subject is the English version of Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi,* a copybook piece of 'affective theology', the less technical theology that borders on lay piety. The translators introduced Latin rhetorical devices into the target text by literal translation and close imitation. The techniques seem akin to those used a century or so later by Cranmer in his drafting of the *Book of Common Prayer.*

It would seem that Bigg's translator shares both the problems and the techniques of the translator of the Old English Genesis B. Colette Stévanovich's article on this rather strange text, an Anglo-Saxon text from Old Saxon, claims that most of the stylistic features of the version come by close literality, and that the occasiortal clumsiness was a price willingly paid. But, given the state of the evidence, this article is somewhat tentative, and I find the firm conclusion a little surprising. Another example of translating between cognate vernaculars is the article on troubadour translation by Chantal Phan. The problem was a strictly commercial one, as the troubadours had to perform in a large number of dialect areas. Audiences in different dialect areas had to be accommodated: semi-translation was required if the troubadour's repertoire was to remain manageable, and it often gave rise to a wide range of interference phenomena. Phan's article is an interesting study in what a song translator can get away with, provided the melody and rhythm remain intact, and the sense is more or less preserved.

Michèle Goyens on the medieval equivalents of the modern adversatives, *toutefois, néanmoins,* and *cependant,* attempts to establish a pattern of linguistic change through the use of these words to translate Latin adversatives. What she does establish is on the one hand, the notable independence of the French medieval translators in this regard, and on the other the already sophisticated Old French system of concessive constructions. The common Latin adversative, *tamen,* is translated by all three, for example. I wonder whether an attetnpt to apply the idea of 'charnière' from 'stylistique comparée' would have improved an already interesting article.

It is not often that one thinks of public policy or administrative need in relation to medieval translation. But Voaden showed that this was one aspect of the dealings of spiritual directors with visionaries: description of spiritual matters as a discourse proper to ecclesiastical authority had to be done according to the conventions. On the topic itself Anthony Pym discusses the famous but shadowy 'School of Toledo' from a public policy angle, pulling together much of what is known about the role of the Christian and non-Christian (Jewish as well as Muslim) translator in the Spain of Alfonso X "el Sabio", and casting considerable doubt on a number of legends. The same sort of considerations are discussed in Joan Williamson's article on the 15th-century Chancellor of Cyprus, Philippe

de Mézières, and the Rule for his Order of the Chivalry of the Passion of Jesus Christ, founded to reconquer the Holy Land. The original seems to have been mainly in French–crusaders were not known for their Latinity–but for official purposes, particularly international discussion, there is a Latin text. This is translation in its widest sense: the translations show considerable evolution of thought and attitude. Williamson makes the important point that many translators, including Marie de France (as discussed by Sahar Amer). had rank equal with the author in the eyes of their public.

One key point of the book is that modern thinking on translation is rediscovering some of the medieval attitudes and themes. For most of our authors, the major focus is textual behaviour: they chronicle a view of translation as disjunction and transmission, but we also find the common modem view that translation is the continuity of the life of the text. This book shows that this life was transmitted in different ways. Translation could be transcription; equally often commentary was an important act of translation. But the boundaries of commentary shift so readily, especially when the commentary is done within the text, that a medieval, or for that matter, a 17th-century translation often seems a new work to us, but the translators concerned were much more aware of the *translatia studii,* by which they had brought their original to their readers. We see the medieval translator as guide and teacher, a person with a fitting *auctoritas.* As *auctor,* a person with authority, he could afford to take a wider view of his task. In their own way each writer in this book makes the point that the medieval translators considered themselves servants to their originals, but that their service was often performed with the high-handed behaviour of one who does not trust the master to be sufficiently appealing and accessible. For the linguist the other point of the book is seeing translation and its linguistic techniques in an intellectual and literary context.

Discussion of the social and linguistic aspects of translation does not match the sophistication of the literary discussion. There is room in this book for the sort of consideration of polysystem discussed by Gideon Toury: the considerable information laid before the reader on the medieval context of translation needs some sort of focus beyond the literary and religious. Likewise, there seems to be little evidence of some of the more modern analyses of translation behaviour. This is, I would submit, an indication of the diversity of

the field. Translation studies have burgeoned incredibly over the last twenty years, and there is considerable risk that a book of this nature will fall into the hands of a reader or reviewer with other backgrounds, as this one has. Yet its qualities make it a salutary reminder that translation is an interdisciplinary craft that is not covered adequately by one single discipline.

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