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Compte rendu

Rita Copeland. *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 350 pp.

TRANSLATION THEORY IS not exactly a hot new topic in medieval studies. Charles Homer Haskins did the massive primary research on medieval translation theory back in the teens and early twenties, and his *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (1924) continues to be an essential resource for work in the field (see Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924]). Werner Schwartz wrote a series of brief but influential period studies on translation theory in the forties, and his piece on classical and medieval theories in the *Journal of Theological Studies*, "The Meaning of *Fidus Interpres* in Medieval Translation" (1944), has been much quoted by later scholars – as has Guy Beaujolan's 1957 French article on "Medieval Science in the Christian West," translated by A.J. Pomerans for a 1963 collection entitled *History of Science*.[1] More recent work by David C. Lindberg, Sebastian Brock, and Marie-Thérèse D'Alverny in the seventies and early eighties brought new critical perspectives on, and new historical details to, the Haskinsian tradition without seriously challenging either its assumptions or its findings.[2] In 1989 Frederick M. Rener published his study of translation theories from Cicero to Tytler, *Interpretatio*, purporting to elucidate the single monolithic rhetorical and grammatical "system" underlying all theories of translation in his eighteen-century period. While his main focus remained the Renaissance, he did venture sporadically into the Middle Ages – and where he did, he underscored the importance of rhetoric and grammar for medieval theorists of translation.[3]

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[1] See Schwartz, "The Meaning of *Fidus Interpres* in Medieval Translation," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1944): 73-78; also "The Theory of Translation in Sixteenth-Century Germany," *Modern Language Review* 40 (1945): 289-99, and "Translation into German in the Fifteenth Century," *Modern Language Review* 39 (1944): 368-73. He also has a later book, *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background.* Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970. For Beaujolan, see René Taton, ed., *History of Science: Ancient and Medieval Science From the Beginnings to 1450* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 468-532.

[2] See Lindberg, " The Transmission of Greek and Arabic Learning to the West," in *Science in the Middle Ages*, edited by Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 52-90; Sebastian Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 20 (Spring 1979): 69-87; and Marie-Thérèse D'Alverny, "Translations and Translators," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, edited by Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 421-62.

[3] Frederick M. Rener, *Interpretatio: Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1989). See also my review of Rener, along with Eric Cheyfitz's *The Poetics of Imperialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) and Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992), "Decolonizing Translation," forthcoming in *Translation and Literature* 2 (1993).

This is precisely the point where Rita Copeland picks up the thread in *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* – but with a difference. Haskins and his followers brought to their task the assumption that translation in the Middle Ages is a series of translators and texts and their commissioners and locales (King X sent Y-of-Z to Here-and-there to translate Such-and-such), and that translation theory in the Middle Ages is a debate between word-for-word and sense-for-sense. This assumption is all but gone in Copeland; where it appears, it appears utterly transformed by the exciting new questions she has asked. Rener brought to his task the assumption that everybody of any worth between Cicero and Tytler had internalized the same set of static rhetorical and grammatical principles (though they differed slightly in their application of those principles to specific cases), and that they all proceeded in their translations by first applying grammar as a "basic set of tools" (*proprietas, puritas, consuetudo, vetustas, auctoritas, ratio, perspicuitas,* etc.) and then applying rhetoric as "tools in ornamentation" (*electio verborum,* tropes, *figurae, periodus, ornatus, ratione materiae et personae,* etc.). This oppressively reified system is gone in Copeland too. Rhetoric and grammar inform Copeland's project from beginning to end, but never as a lockstep robotic operating system.

Rather, as Copeland says in her introductory formulation, her book "seeks to define the place of vernacular translation within the systems of rhetoric and hermeneutics in the Middle Ages. In serving this aim, its concern is not with a narrow pragmatics or theory of translation in the Middle Ages. Rather, it seeks to show how translation is inscribed within a large disciplinary nexus, a historical intersection of hermeneutical practice and rhetorical theory" (1). In pursuing this aim she eschews the methodological assumptions of both Haskins and his followers – "it is not by tracing the fortunes of these [classical translatological] commonplaces that we can evaluate the theoretical conditions under which ideas about translation were mediated from antiquity to the Middle Ages" (9) – and Rener, whom (along with hundreds, perhaps thousand of others) she seems to be describing when she notes wryly, "Rhetorical theory has also been a notable victim of this kind of positivism. It has been viewed as a neutral perceptive system, a descriptive taxonomy of style, or as an academic discipline whose history is constituted by manifest meanings and whose claims to truth about the nature of language and discourse are accepted on their own terms" (4).

Copeland avoids both of these methodological pitfalls by contextualizing her study within the clash between two medieval cultures, vernacular culture and Latin academic culture. One of her dominant premises is that "translation is a vehicle for vernacular appropriation of academic discourse" (3), and specifically for the vernacular appropriation of the very appropriative moment in academic discourse that works "to displace the very text that it proposes to serve" (3). Her agonistic model serves her well, allowing her to explore disciplinary conflicts as motors of change: translation theory in Cicero and Horace is generated out of a rhetorical opposition to the slavish copying of the grammarians; Cicero's appropriative transformation of the source text into an original target text is both recovered and repressed in patristic writings, especially Jerome's letter to Pammachius, recovered *as* a repressive hermeneutic that proscribes innovation, but re-

turns in Augustinian preaching and later, and more importantly, in the very exegetical tradition that was developed to control original thought. As Copeland puts it, in the early Middle Ages "The rhetorical value of translation is lost in the very discourses that carry over Ciceronian theories of translation; but hermeneutical practice itself takes over the functions of rhetoric and creates a new context in which a rhetorical model of translation can emerge" (6). *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* is a fascinating group ground where dualisms are continually in movement under the reader's feet, requiring constant alertness and great conceptual nimbleness – so much, in fact, that I hesitate to make any specific claims about just how Copeland says rhetoric and hermeneutics, *enarratio poetarum* and *exercitatio, expositio* and *inventio* shift and interflow throughout her period, because I am almost certain I will get it wrong.

The conceptual complexity that makes the book difficult to summarize, however, makes it exciting to read (at least for the reader with a good deal of interest in and knowledge of either the history of translation theory or the history of medieval criticism; this is not a book for the General Educated Reader). Medieval studies are not traditionally a hotbed of flashy theorizing, and Copeland is careful not to bombard her medievalist readers with trendy names and terms; but she is clearly well-read in theory, and she plies the complicating analytical perspectives of recent theorists (especially Roman Jakobson's now-canonical metaphor/metonymy opposition and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur) with a good deal of suppleness.[4] Indeed if the rather stolid work of Haskins, Lindberg, and D'Alverny is any indication of medievalists' discursive expectations, the analytical wizardry that to me seems so intelligent and compelling in Copeland's book is likely to put many of her colleagues off; it is going to seem trendy and superfluous at worst, at best unnecessarily convoluted.

Still, within the segment of medieval criticism she marks off, "academic traditions and vernacular text," it would be hard for a medievalist to dismiss her lightly. She is clearly a formidable authority on the traditions she explores: Cicero and Horace and generally Roman theories of translation in chapter one; patristic theories (especially Jerome) and the rhetoric/grammar clash of late antiquity in chapter two; the rhetorical nature of medieval exegesis, and Notker of St. Gall and the *Ovide moralisé* as examples of "rhetorical" commentary, in chapters three and four; French and English "receptions" and transformations of Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae* in chapter five; and rhetorical invention within the hermeneutical tradition, and Chaucer and Gower as examples, in chapters six and seven. She quotes extensively, in the original languages and her own useful translations, from the primary texts, making her book invaluable not only as a commentary on, but as a source book of, medieval translation theories. Ph.D. students in medieval studies, and generally anyone looking for research topics in the field, would do

[4] For Jakobson, see "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances." in Jakobson and Morris Halle, eds., *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956), 69-96. For Gadamer, see *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1989). Copeland only cites Ricoeur once (61), from *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), but his work is indebted to and congruent with Gadamer's. The only poststructuralist theorist Copeland mentions is Foucault, and only in passing, in reference to his concept of the "author-function" (116); but clearly, a good deal of the analytical work she does is poststructuralist in venue.

well to comb her book carefully, as she generates exciting avenues for scholarly exploration on every page. It should go without saying that she has just barely scratched the surface in this enormously rich and complex period; the scratches she has made may well transform the study of medieval literature and criticism by placing translation at its very core.

The book also has some problems, one of which I broached earlier: it is difficult to read, for all the right reason, to be sure – her steadfast attention to the complexity of the traditions she traces – but that is not likely to reassure the reader who feels, as I occasionally did, overwhelmed by the swirl of shifting categories. In her attempt to clarify that swirl for herself and for her readers, too, Copeland often lapses into sheer repetition: "also reflected the troublesome overlap between the concerns of grammar and rhetoric" *and* "there was much overlap between the practices of commentary, translation, and imitation, just as there was much overlap between the study of grammar and rhetoric" (10); "Within grammatical study, translation was considered to be a special aspect of textual commentary; within rhetorical study, translation was seen as a special form of imitation" *and* "When used as an exercise in grammatical study, translation represented a form of commentary; when associated with rhetorical study and the production of speeches, translation constituted a form of imitation" (10); "the object of translation is difference with the source" *and* "Thus in translation, the force of rhetorical invention should produce difference with the source" (30).

A more serious problem than repetition, though, is the obsessive dualism reflected in those repeated passages. Copeland has read enough poststructuralist theory to want to contaminate each side of any dualism she constructs with its opposite pole, and as I've been saying, she delights in showing how these dualisms constantly shift and settle through the years; but she also clearly *believes* in dualism, in the logical operation by which a complex field is split up into two opposite extremes and then mapped onto a "continuum" between them, and longs for more conceptual stability than can tease out of her field.

More than that, she believes in dualistic idealization, in the abstract dualisms favored by structuralism and early poststructuralism as opposed to the more politically and historically grounded dualisms of later (Marxist, Feminist, and other) poststructuralisms. For example, she writes early on that "the transmission of classical and patristic theories of translation is not a history of continuity but a series of ruptures" (55), in effect *rupturing* the history of continuity that previous historians of medieval translation theory have wanted to construct. That is a good start, but talk of a "series of ruptures" does not really take us very far; it still sidesteps the ideological war that was being waged over the political unconscious at the time, the steady pressures being brought on translators from above to impose dogmatic meanings on their texts (and to thematize those dogmatic meanings as "transcendental," "divine," and to call the translations that resulted sense-for-sense), and their tenacious resistance to those pressures through deepseated mystical fears of direct communicability. Copeland lacks a social psychology, a sense of the controlled collective and resistant individual and group motivations that drive things like tradition and innovation; there are ideological agents in her book, but they are vague, shadowy figures

that flit uneasily in and out of her argument, peripheralized by large formal abstractions like primary and secondary translation, or metaphor and metonymy – a dualism that, reeking as it does of seventies structuralism, put me off most in the book. "In the case of medieval vernacular translations, this tension between metaphoric structure (difference, displacement, substitution) and metonymic structure (continuity and evolution within the same linguistic community) mirrors in reverse the structural pattern of the relationship of Latin commentary to Latin *auctores*" (129). Even for seventies structuralism metonymy has much more difference and displacement in it than Copeland will admit; the magic word "contiguity," applied to metonymy by Jakobson and all his structuralist followers (and capitalized on, and transformed in the direction of its difference and displacement, by Lacan and Derrida), never appears in Copeland's book, perhaps because she wants metonymy to signify tradition, historical continuity, the idealized image of stable generational succession that traditionalists see everywhere. Metaphor for Copeland is another word for innovation, the displacement of the old text by a new one, translation as rewriting or Ciceronian/Horatian imitation – a fairly lame tropology of translation that is absolutely crippled by its duality.[5]

Part of the problem is that Copeland does not really know or care (nor does anybody else, probably, but Copeland seems to be in the best position to *ask*, and does not) how her dualisms link up with larger historical (especially ideological, political-unconscious) trends. She seems to be intimating, but also repressing through the use of her abstract structuralist vocabulary, that there is a battle being fought here between forces of tradition and innovation, social/cultural/textual stability and unrest, political control and personal freedom – and that, while the sides keep changing and intermingling and stealing from each other, coopting each other, there is a certain large trend from freedom and innovation in chapter one (Rome – Cicero and Horace), through a period of repression in chapters two through five (maybe six), to a gradual recuperation of that freedom and innovation in chapter seven (maybe starting in six). It's the Renaissance myth, of course, the myth of the noble classical ideas lost in the night of the Middle Ages and recovered by bold vernacular writers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; but this is too pat or simple-minded an answer for a sophisticated intellectual historian like Copeland, so she buries it in disclaimers to the effect that "primary" and "secondary" translation do not necessarily mean that "primary" translation comes first and "secondary" translation second *historically* (93-94 – though it sort of does work that way), and disperses the broad outlines of the myth into proliferating dualisms like rhetoric and hermeneutics, *enarratio* and *exercitatio*, metaphor and metonymy, essentially turning the history of translation theory and practice from Cicero to Gower into a complex synchronic system

[5] My impatience here is fueled by my own work with *six* (and ultimately, potentially, an infinite number of) tropes of translation in *The Translator's Turn* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), which, since our books appeared the same year, Copeland cannot be expected to have read when she was writing her own. Many of her remarks about appropriate commentary, for example, suggest synecdoche far more strongly than either metaphor or metonymy: "The text can be 'rewritten' as formally unified because its meaning or cause has been discovered" (78), for example, or "While allegoresis figures itself – even modestly – as disclosure, it in fact operates as a deep recausing of the text as if from within the text" (81). See *The Translator's Turn*, esp. 153-57.

whose "primary" and "secondary" qualities can be discussed in reassuring abstract terms – in terms of "affinities and innate characteristics" rather than "diachronic order" (94).

This is, clearly, only a first attempt at bringing complex theoretical perspective to bear on the bewildering historical culturescape of the Middle Ages – an unquestionably rich and valuable attempt that lays the groundwork for future inquiries.[6] Copeland does not pretend to draw up the lines of force between developments in translation theory and social and political history; she does mention some class and profession indicators in passing in her discussion of the *Roman de la Rose* and elsewhere (the aristocracy and middle class as writer and reader), but a large-scale exploration of these matters is beyond the scope of her book, and remains to be written. We still need a social history of medieval translation theory in terms, say, of social class, economics, land management, birth order, and gender. We still need a political history of medieval translation in terms of shifting church-state relations, and the contested construction of the "individual" or the "self" (as obedient or innovative, as socialized or isolated) in the confluence of those relations; or in terms of conquest and empire, both within and at the borders of "Europe" or "the West," and the geopolitical consolidation of those entities through military conflict with Islam.

That *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* is not one of these books is not a strike against it. In some sense, in fact, it would be difficult to write one of those books without Copeland's exploratory work to ground it. Copeland's book is part of a growing body of work in translation theory that is transforming not only translation theory but the historical periods, national literatures, philosophical methods, and political practices that it so restlessly explores. Just as German romanticism will no longer be quite the same since Antoine Berman introduced translation into it; just as Continental philosophy has looked different since Jacques Derrida theorized translation for it; just as the face of European colonialism has been changed by Eric Cheyfitz's *Poetics of Imperialism* and Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation* and the essays by Samia Mehrez, Richard Jacquemond, and Sherry Simon in Lawrence Venuti's *Rethinking Translation*; so too will medieval literature and criticism be transformed by Rita Copeland.[7]

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[6] I wish I had read it, in fact, when I wrote *The Translator's Turn*, which, as Copeland points out in her review in *Allegorica*, is historically naive about the Middle Ages.

[7] See Berman, *L'Épreuve de l'éstranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); translated by Stefan Heyvaert as *The Experience of the Foreign: Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992). See also his "La Traduction et la lettre, ou l'auberge du lointain," in *Les Tours de Babel: Essais sur la traduction* (Mauvezin: Trans-Europ-Repress, 1985): 35-150. For Derrida, see "Des tours de Babel," in Joseph F. Graham, ed., *Difference in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1985), 209-48 (French original) and 165-207 (Graham's translation). Bibliographical information for Cheyfitz and Niranjana is given in note 3. In *Rethinking Translation: Discourse, Subjectivity, Ideology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), Venuti collects Mehrez's "Translation and the Postcolonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text" (120-38), Jacquemond's "Translation and Cultural Hegemony: The Case of French-Arabic Translation" (139-58), and Simon's "The Language of Cultural Difference: Figures of Alterity in Canadian Translation" (159-76). I reviewed Heyvaert's translation of Berman's book in this journal ("Foreignizing Experience," 20.3-4 [1993], 417-33), and Venuti's book in *Genre* ("Subversive Translation Theorists," forthcoming).

As part of that transformation, surely – the encyclopedic and yet severely circumscribed nature of Copeland's book makes this clear – we need most of all a comprehensive encyclopedia of translation, with entries not only on who translated what, when, how, and where, at whose behest, and how it was received, imitated, transformed by later writers, but also on rhetoric, grammar, and hermeneutics, on the word-for-word/sense-for-sense debate, on translation as a channel of empire, on legislation concerning translator's rights and duties, on specific translation theorists and schools and periods of translation theory, on the various histories of translation and translation theory that have appeared, and so on. We have the scholarly resources now to compile such an encyclopedia (although much primary research remains to be done); what we lack is disciplinary consensus, a widespread feeling that we *exist* as a discipline and have certain knowledge that needs to be pooled and disseminated. Once that consensus is in place, a publisher will appear to undertake it and grant money will materialize to subsidize it.

And perhaps it is already beginning to happen. Routledge and Kent State University Press have new publication series on translation, and Northern Illinois University Press is contemplating one. A movement is afoot to make translation studies a division of the Modern Language Association. New paradigm-busting books on translation continue to appear, a dozen or so in the past two years and more on the way – including at least three anthologies of translation theory readings.[8] In the past year I have met more translators who have become interested in, even excited about, translation theory than I did in the ten or fifteen years before that; as theorists increasingly spend more time exploring what translators do and less time making them feel guilty about it, translation theory comes to seem a project in which translators can participate. Translation studies is in a state of fermentation that holds enormous promise for the future.

Reference: *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, vol. 21, No. 3, 1994, p. 521-528.

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[8] See Andrew Chesterman, ed., *Readings in Translation Theory* (Helsinki: Finn Lectura, 1989); Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet, eds., *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992); and Andre Lefevere, ed., *Translation/culture/History: A Sourcebook* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).