

VONDEL ON TRANSLATION

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1

This essay attempts to gain insight into seventeenth-century conceptions of literary translation in the Low Countries by looking at one of its central figures, Joost van den Vondel. The emphasis will be on the terms of Vondel's discourse on translation as much as on the nature of the views he expounds. The observations that are offered are both preliminary and provisional. Only further study will show to what extent Vondel's approach to matters of translation can be regarded as representative.

2

For most of his life Vondel was an active translator as well as a prolific original writer. In all, his work as a translator spans more than half a century. His first translation was published in 1616, when he was in his late twenties; by the time his last translation appeared in 1671, he was well into his eighties. Although the bulk of his translations are from the Latin, he also worked from Greek, French, Italian and, in just one or two instances, German. He covered several genres as a translator, ranging from epic and lyrical poetry to tragedy. Sometimes he worked alone, more often in collaboration with others, better versed than he was in Latin and especially Greek. In these cases a more or less collective prose version of the foreign original would usually be established first, which Vondel would then put to rhyme by himself. As a rule, Vondel readily acknowledged this help. The translation of Seneca's *Troades* (*De Amsteldamsche Hecuba*, 1626) had, in his own words, "several fathers" ("verscheide vaders"; II: 533).¹ In the early 1630s Daniel Mostart and Joan Victorijn (or Vechters) are mentioned as having provided help with the translation of Hugo Grotius' *Sophompaneas* (*Josef of Sofompaneas*, 1635; III: 435) and with the lyrical poems and the *Ars Poetica* of Horace (*Q. Horatius Flaccus Lierzangen en Dichtkunst*, 1654; VII: 262), while a few years later the young Isaac Vos was of assistance in rendering the Greek of Sophocles' *Electra* into Dutch (*Elektra*, 1639; III: 641). In the dedication accompanying the prose translation of Virgil's complete works (1646) he speaks more generally of his regular "consultations with linguists" ("overleg van taelkondigen") while translating, and how some of them had recently died or were now otherwise engaged (VI: 44).

Vondel's activity as a translator may be subdivided into four periods. The first period goes from around 1615 to the early 1620s, when Vondel is grappling with the epic poetry of the Frenchman Guillaume de Salluste, seigneur du Bartas, and the Italian Torquato Tasso; whereas the verse translations from Du Bartas appeared in print in 1616 (*De Vaderen*) and 1620 (*De Heerlyckheyd van Salomon*), the prose rendering of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* remained in manuscript form and appears never to have reached its final stage.² In the second period, which stretches from the mid-1620s to around 1640, Vondel translated several Latin plays by Seneca (*Amsteldamsche Hecuba*, 1626, and *Hippolytus*, 1628) and Grotius (*Sofompaneas*, 1635), as well as Sophocles' *Electra* (1639), which however, like all his translations from the Greek, relies heavily on Latin humanist cribs and commentaries, as A.M.F.B. Geerts (1932) has demonstrated. The prose translations of Horace and of Ovid's *Heroides* (*Heldinnenbrieven*) also date from the 1630s, but Vondel never intended either of these for publication.³ The third period, from the early 1640s to 1660, is entirely taken up with the translation of Virgil: the complete work into prose in 1646, the Second Book of the *Aeneid* into verse (*Ondergang van Troje*) in 1655, and the verse translation of the complete work in 1660. As Kalff noted nearly a century ago, the verse rendering of Virgil is largely a reworking of the earlier prose version, although Vondel did consult the Latin original anew (Kalff 1894: 62). The fourth and last period, from 1660 to 1671, sees four Greek tragedies in translation, two by Sophocles (*Koning Edipus*, 1660, and *Herkules in Trachin*, 1668) and two by Euripides (*Ifigenie in Tauren*, 1666, and *Fenciaiensche of Gebroeders van Thebe*, 1668), and concludes with the verse translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Herscheppinge*, 1671).

As this division into periods already suggests, there is a clear evolution in Vondel's long activity as a translator. Having started with French and Italian epic poetry, his interest shifts to Latin plays in the 1620s and subsequently focusses on Virgil for nearly twenty years, to make way in the final decade for a preoccupation with the Greek dramatists. Vondel's method of translating also changes: whereas the early versions usually stay very close to the original text, we see him gradually taking some degree of liberty as he becomes more consciously aware of both the linguistic and literary constraints under which translation takes place. The prose version of Virgil (1646) remains a curious

exception in this respect, but it is one which Vondel himself feels called upon to explain and justify at some length in the dedication of the work. But let us now turn to Vondel's statements on translation.

3

Most of his comments on the subject are to be found in prefaces and dedications accompanying individual translations, but some interesting observations also occur in laudatory poems written for other translators. The distinction between these two literary forms is important, because both are governed to a considerable degree by rhetorical conventions. In prefaces, and even more so in dedications, the translator's stance is traditionally one of modesty and humility, even self-depreciation. He will, as a rule, understate his own abilities and belittle his achievement in order to highlight the difficulty of the task, the excellence of the original author and/or the erudition of his patron (cf. Leiner 1965). The opposite applies to congratulatory poems, which are given to overstatement and hyperbole (cf. Curtius 1953: 161-63), and, in their fulsome praise, invariably upgrade the translator's achievement and status vis-à-vis the original author.

The difference between these two rhetorical discourses, then, involves not only a question of interpretation - neither should in the end be taken at face value - but also bears on the way the hierarchical relation between translation and source text is perceived. While the prefaces and dedications repeatedly stress the inferiority of the translated text in comparison with the original work, the complimentary poems on fellow translators present a very different picture, putting original writer and translator on a par, as equals. Given that both discourses exist side by side throughout the period, it may be that the seventeenth-century view of translation is rather more balanced, and hence more complex, than might appear at first sight.

Since the majority of Vondel's statements on translation occur in prefaces and dedications, it does not come as a surprise to find that they are mostly also ad hoc pronouncements, relating to specific issues and problems. Hardly ever does he venture into discussions of general questions of translation as we encounter them, for example, in Huygens. On the other hand, some of his comments remain intriguing, for various reasons. Also, by considering more closely the images and metaphors Vondel uses to describe the nature of translation and the relation between source and target text, we can form some idea of his conception of translation and of that wider, international stock of metaphors that is at the core of the seventeenth-century metalanguage of literary translation (Hermans 1985). Among the key texts to be considered in Vondel's case will be the preface to *De Heerlyckheyd van Salomon*, after Du Bartas (1620), the dedication to Maria Tesselschade of his *Elektra* (1639), and the dedication to Huygens of the prose rendering of Virgil (1646). On the whole, the liminary texts found in Vondel's translations from his fourth and last period add little or nothing that is new with respect to problems and methods of translation.

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Vondel's very first statement on translation, then, the sixteen-line poem preceding his version of Du Bartas' *Les Pères*, an episode from the *Seconde Sepmaine (De Vaderen, 1616; I: 477)*, already contains several points of interest. It clearly establishes the hierarchical relation between the translated text and its original, but also, in a typical combination, provides a rationale for undertaking the task of translating. Vondel's own note in the margin of the introductory poem leaves no doubt as to the relation between source and target text: the lines, he says, are addressed "to the Poet, whose learned verses he values much more highly than this translation" ("aenden Dichter, welckers geleerde veersen hy verre boven dese vertalinghe waerdeert"). The qualitative inferiority of the translation and its derivative status are stressed at the very beginning of the poem, in the image of the translator's pale star which borrows its light from the sun ("dat ick bleecke sterr' mijn licht scheppe uyt u Son"). Although this imagery itself is not unusual, it is possible that in this case Vondel is harking back to Karel van Mander, who was another ardent admirer of Du Bartas and had referred to the French poet as "the light of the French language" (cf. Hendriks 1892: 59; Molkenboer 1950: 155). In any case, Vondel will use the same image many years later, when in his 'Parnasloof' for Cornelis de Graeff, the long poem preceding the verse translation of Virgil (1660), he leaves it to De Graeff to judge the difference between the Dutch version and the light that emanates from Virgil ("wat haer glans verschilt van 't licht, dat uit hem strael", VI: 86). The contrast between "glans" and "licht" here, too, suggests the superiority of the original, as well as the fact that Virgil's poem is an autonomous source of light, whereas the translation is merely a derived product. In the 1616 poem on Du Bartas, the translator's sense of his own inferiority is emphasized once more with a different image a few lines further on, when Vondel describes himself as no more than a choirboy with an untrained voice ("ick...onaenghenaemste krael"), an image reminiscent of Coornhert's prefatory lines to the reader in his translation of Homer in 1561 ("Mijn stem docht mij te lelijk van klank./ Om te zingen des Poëtens zank / Die alder Poëten fontein is", Coornhert ed. 1939: 5).

The rationale which Vondel gives for translating in these circumstances is that even a faint star, however dull its light, still illuminates the dark (“De bleekste sterre hoe doof, en droef datse is van luyster/...so straeltse noch int duyster”, I: 477). The appeal is here clearly to translation as performing a public service: although the translated text may not be able to replace the original due to its qualitative inferiority, it nevertheless provides access to something which would otherwise remain inaccessible for those unable to read the foreign language. Huygens will employ much the same rationale - and imagery - in a poem of 1650, in which he argues in favour of translation on the grounds that shaded light, i.e. translation, is beneficial to those who are dazzled by bright sunlight (“Khebb lamper-doeck sien trecken/ Voor oghen die 'tgeweld van somer-sonne-schijn/ Niet uijt en konden staen”, Huygens ed. 1892-9, IV: 207).

In broader terms, the Renaissance view of translation as playing a public role is often conveyed by means of a variety of images stressing the usefulness of translation in terms of unlocking doors, bringing to light or into view, removing obstacles, digging up or bringing back treasures to be shared by all, etc. Naturally, this type of vindication of translation will also come to the fore, and with noticeably more emphasis, in laudatory poems. Vondel's sonnet on Zacharias Heyns' translation of Du Bartas' complete work in 1621 casts the translator as a high priest opening up the sanctuary which hitherto many Dutchmen could not enter because of the language barrier (“STaels onkunde hield tot noch veel Nederlanders buyten./ Die in het Heyligdom der Vrancken wilden gaen/...Maar Zacharias als Hooghpriester quam ontslyuten/ Dees Kerck”; II: 406). Huygens' complimentary poem on Wessel van Boetselaer's version of Du Bartas' *Premiere Sepmaine* of 1622 points to a closely related aspect: the translator can save us much time and trouble, for he has shown us a shortcut to the original (“Loopt niet soo willigh meer tydt, middel, moeyte waghē...Neemt Boetzeleer te hulp; hij weet een naerder padt”; Huygens ed. 1892-9, I: 214). Huygens repeats this idea in somewhat stronger form in 1657, when he remarks in a poem on V. van Oosterwijck's *Gulden Spreuken*, translated after the English of Joseph Hall, that it would be a waste of effort (“onnutte moeijt”) to go and look for the gold of the *Gulden Spreuken* where it grows, for it may be readily found here in the translation (*ibid.*, VI: 223).⁴ A very similar view of the translated text as being capable of replacing the source text emerges from Vondel's poem of 1650 on Hendrik Bloemaert's version of Guarini's *Pastor Fido*: now that we have this translation, we no longer need the original (“Jonckheyt, laet Tuskanen vaeren:/ Bloemaert leert in luttel blaeren/ U in duytsch het Herders-spel”; V: 522).

These laudatory poems clearly intensify an idea which is present only in muted form in Vondel's prefatory lines to his Du Bartas translation. The idea itself, though, that translation performs a useful public service by letting the light shine in the darkness, is already commonplace in the sixteenth century, when the defenders of writing in the vernacular and of translating into the vernacular both refer to the biblical saying that “no man lygtheth a candle to cover it with a bushell” to justify their activities (see in England, for instance, Thomas Elyot in 1541 and Thomas Phaer in 1544; cf. Jones 1953: 49). Some sixteenth-century translators go so far as to claim that not to translate amounts to withholding something valuable from the people. As early as 1475 the German translator Heinrich Stainhöwel declares that he has engaged in translation so that those without Latin “should not be deprived of something so good” (“soellicher gutheyt auch nit waeren beraubt”; Vanderheyden 1980: 147). Observing the scarcity of Dutch translations from the Latin in 1541, the Antwerp publisher Jan Gymnick, in the preface to an anonymous translation of Livy, thinks it disgraceful that “such costly and profitable treasures have been withheld, indeed stolen from the common man” (“so costelijcke ende profitelijcke scatten ondergehouden/ia den ghemeynen man ontstolen hebben”; Vanderheyden 1959: 126). Thomas Sebillet's *Art poetique francoys* (1548) sees the translator as one who “extracts the hidden treasure from the bowels of the earth in order to put them to common use” (“qui...tire des entrailles de la terre le tre'sor cache', pour le faire commun a` l'usage de tous les hommes”; Sebillet ed. 1972: 73). Nicholas Grimald's statement, in the preface to his version of Cicero (1556), is equally emphatic: “...chiefly for our unlattined people I have made this latine writer, english: and have now brought into light, that from them so longe was hidden: and have caused...a boke, used but of fewe, to wax common to a great meany” (Vanderheyden 1980: 144). William Painter's dedication of his *Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure* (1567) puts it in more general terms when he says that translators “imploye those paines, that no Science lurke in corner, that no knowledge be shut up in cloisters, that no Historie remain under the maske and unknowne attire of other tongues” (Jones 1953: 44). These random examples may go to show that in Vondel's poem of 1616 the seemingly casual remark about the function of translation is in fact deeply embedded in a well-established and international discourse on the subject. However unemphatic his expression here may be, it does not stand alone, and we can safely assume that his readers would not have misunderstood its import.

preface to Vondel's second published translation, *De Heerlyckheyd van Salomon* (1620), another episode from Du Bartas' *Seconde Sepmaine*. The dedication (II: 226-7) opens with a French quotation from Montaigne, to the effect that great poetry, "la bonne la supreme la divine", can enchant and dumbfound the reader in a single instant. Vondel will use the same passage again, this time translated into Dutch, in the dedication accompanying his *Ondergang van Troje* (1655; VI: 71). Montaigne's comparison of the impact of poetry with a bolt of lightning ("la splendeur d'un esclair) provides Vondel with an appropriate image, for while translating, he says, he was "dazed" and "blinded" by this divine light ("in zulcken Goddelijcken licht geschemerooght") and he has therefore failed to "express Saluste as Saluste" ("is hier Salustius niet als Salustius uytgedrukt"; II: 226-7). Towards the end of the dedication Vondel speaks of his verses being as no more than "borrowed lines" ("geleende veersen"), a reference to the derivative nature of the translated text, and one which is taken up again in the preface ('Voorreden', II: 228-30), Vondel's first important statement on translation.

Here two images appear which characterize the translator's work as second-hand: he has engaged in translation because "a poor household often needs to borrow from others" ("een beroyd huysraed moet veeltijds van anderen wat te leen bezitten"), and the translator is like a magpie among peacocks, bragging with borrowed feathers ("d'Exter die onder de Paeuwen met geleende veeren dacht te pronken"). The first image suggests that a writer incapable, or not yet capable, of original work can make up for this and sharpen his tools by translating. In that sense it foreshadows the observation in the *Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche Dichtkunste* (1650) that translation constitutes a useful exercise for the aspiring poet, as a prelude to original work.⁵ The image of the magpie among the peacocks, which effectively brands the translator as an impostor, is taken from Aesop's Fables; it also occurs as emblem no. 48 in Vondel's *Vorstellicke warande der dieren* of 1617 (I: 613) and in several other places (for example in Eduard de Dene's *Warachtighe fabulen der dieren*, 1567; cf. Meertens ed. 1983: 25). Behind it stands the crucial difference between translator and original writer: the question of *inventio*, which takes pride of place in the traditional system of rhetoric and which is so signally absent in the translator's work. The notion of the primacy of *inventio*, and the concomitant idea of the subordination of the translated text to the original's *inventio*, dates back to Roman times. Book X of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* initiates the discussion of the concept of imitation by positing the ineluctable pre-eminence of invention over any form of imitation, and goes on to treat the latter in terms of the follower who must necessarily lag behind the front runner and of the copy which is inevitably inferior to the original (cf. Quintilian ed. 1922, IV: 79-81). The precedence of *inventio* over other rhetorical qualities is affirmed by virtually all medieval and Renaissance handbooks on rhetoric.

One consequence of this is that the translator can never regard the fruits of his labour as being fully his own, for translation does not confer ownership of intellectual property. Vondel's references to "borrowed lines" ("geleende veersen") and "borrowed feathers" ("geleende veeren") only restate this essential point. As early as 1545 the French translator Hugues Salel had somewhat sourly remarked, in the prefatory poem to his version of the first ten books of the Iliad, that translation was "a difficult task that brings much labour and little honour, for whatever the perfect translator may achieve, the honour always goes to the original writer" ("une peine/Qui grand travail et peu d'honneur ameine/Car quoi que face ung parfait traducteur./Tousjours l'honneur retourne a l'inventeur"; Weinberg 1950:128). Salel's use of the word *inventeur* for the original author is probably not accidental. As late as 1697 John Dryden in the dedication of his Aeneid puts across the same idea, in terms that stress the issue of ownership, when he remarks: "But slaves we are, and labour on another man's plantation; we dress the vineyard, but the wine is the owner's" (Dryden ed. 1962, II: 250).

Like the prefatory poem of 1616, the 1620 preface also indicates Vondel's rationale for undertaking the translation in the first place. In contrast with the earlier poem, however, the motivation given here is more personal, a "secret passion" ("heymelijcke hartstocht") to see how successful a Dutch version of the poem would be. His boldness in attempting the translation ("Ick wickte. Ick waeghde't") is tempered by the fear of failure ("gelijck my vreeze zomtjids dede deynzen"), even the certainty of failure, as the subsequent reference to Phaeton makes clear. The implication appears to be that the translator is attempting something he knows to be beyond his strength, but that the attempt, however reckless or desperate, is commendable in itself - as indeed Vondel suggests by quoting Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on Phaeton (II: 230).⁶ In the opposition between the desire to measure himself against Du Bartas and the certainty of defeat, Vondel is actually touching on the imagery of imitation rather than translation. In the metalanguage of imitation from Classical times onwards it is the notion of contest which gives the imitative mode its emulative edge, and in the treatise *On the Sublime* by (Pseudo-)Longinus imitation is treated in 'eristic' terms, as a wrestling-match with a stronger opponent, a struggle that leads to the imitator's inevitable but honourable defeat (cf. Pigman 1980). Vondel, of course, stresses the aspect of failure through the reference to Phaeton's lot - a type of reference he seems to have regarded as highly appropriate to characterize the translator's endeavour, for in later years he comes up with several variants of it: the translator who wants to compete with David's psalms will suffer Lucifer's ignominious fate (1640; IV: 53); if he hopes to outdo Sophocles he is like Pan challenging Apollo and will end up growing donkey's ears like Midas (1668; X: 548); and even when, in the poem 'Parnasloof' (1660), he is speaking of his plans for a Dutch epic poem in imitation of Virgil,

he pictures himself as Icarus flying on wings of wax ("met wasse penne", VI: 91) and bound to come to grief.

The 1620 preface also contains Vondel's first statement about his actual method of translating. In his request to the reader to look kindly upon his verses, he begins by pointing out that he is presenting "a translation and not my own invention" ("een vertalinge en geen eygen vindinge", II: 229). Apart from the rather blunt comment that "my mother did not teach me better Dutch" ("dat mijn moeder my geen beter nederduytsch geleerd heeft"), Vondel then reminds his reader that "we could have written more smoothly, had we not wanted to tie ourselves more closely to the text" ("dat wy zoetelijcker hadden mogen vloeyen zoo wy ons niet naeuwer aende tekst wilden binden"), which explicitly indicates his strongly source-oriented approach at this stage. The point he makes about presenting a translation and not his own work already entails a recognition of the translator's limited freedom of action, but it is greatly intensified here: the translator is bound not only by the original author's *inventio* (Vondel's "vindinge"), but his subordination extends to the level of expression.⁷ As Vondel puts it here, the constraints imposed by the original text take precedence over any other considerations regarding the wording of the target text. His practice as a translator in these years clearly bears this out, as for example Molkenboer's comparison between Du Bartas' poem and Vondel's version of it has shown (Molkenboer 1950: 329-334). The draft translation of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, which probably dates from roughly the same period,⁸ also follows the Italian text very closely indeed (cf. Nijland 1930-31). In subsequent years, however, Vondel will abandon this exclusive preoccupation with the letter of the original, as he gradually introduces target-related norms of both a linguistic and a literary nature.

6

The first indication of Vondel's growing awareness of constraints deriving from the target language come in the dedication to Anthonis de Hubert of the *Amsteldamsche Hecuba*, after Seneca (1626; II: 533-34). The text contains the usual topoi of praise for the original - Vondel refers to Grotius' honorific title 'Queen of tragedies' for the play - and the admission that the translation is obviously unable to match this excellence - he wishes that his version "might have borrowed more from Seneca's splendour" ("datse...meer luysters van Seneca ontleent hadde"). He then goes on to compliment De Hubert on the "pure Dutch" ("suyver Nederduyts") of his psalm translations (published in 1624), and explains that he too has attempted to respect "all the properties of our mother tongue" ("alle eyenschappen onser moederlijcke taele"), in accordance with the discussions among friends of the so-called Muyden Circle, discussions in which De Hubert had taken part. Vondel's concern for the quality of the Dutch language in the context of translation had first appeared in his laudatory poem on Wessel van Boetselaer's version (1622) of Du Bartas' *Premiere Sepmaine*, which he had praised for its "simple and pure Dutch" ("plat en suyver duyts", II: 429). The compliments to Wessel and De Hubert, and the attempt in this translation to respect "the properties of our mother tongue" contrast sharply with the statement a few years earlier that he "could have written more smoothly had we not wanted to tie ourselves more closely to the [original] text". There is little doubt that the shift of emphasis is a direct result of the linguistic gatherings at Roemer Visscher's house and then at Muyden Castle in the 1620s. The fact that this verse translation of Seneca is based on a prose crib made in collaboration with Drost and Reael, two other regular members of these gatherings, helps to account for the new emphasis. Nevertheless, Vondel's rendering still stays close to the Latin: Geeraard Brandt goes so far as to say that the Dutch text "followed on the heels of the Latin" ("het Latyn op de voet volghde"; Brandt.1932: 28).

7

Although nearly ten years went by before Vondel published his next translation, the preface to *Huigh de Groots Iosef of Sofompaneas* (1635; III: 433-35) continues the line of thought first mooted in the *Amsteldamsche Hecuba*. There are the usual formulas to indicate the qualitative gap between original and translation: Vondel puts Grotius on a par with Euripides and refers to his own work as mere "stammering" ("stamelen"); and again he acknowledges the assistance of others in producing the translation - Mostart and Victorijn in this case, who also helped him in rendering Horace into Dutch in these years. Vondel's new attitude to the translator's task, however, appears most clearly when he states that "we have not wanted to follow too closely on the heels of the Latin, nor to deviate too far from our excellent example [literally: forerunner]" ("Wy hebben het Latijn niet al dicht willen op de hielen volgen, noch oock te verre van onzen voortreffelijcken voorganger afwijcken", III: 435), and expresses the hope that in doing so he has steered the proper course ("Maer of wy hier in de rechte maete houden, dat zal het Groote Vernuft ... kunnen oordeelen").

The image of the translator as following a forerunner (or front runner) derives from the discourse of imitation in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (cf. above) and it is a common image in the Renaissance metalanguage of translation and imitation alike (Pigman 1980; Hermans 1985). But whereas Quintilian stresses the need for the imitator to compete

with the man in front, the discourse on translation as it develops in the Renaissance ignores the notion of contest and thus never calls into question the original's superiority. The image then serves to distinguish more 'literal' from 'freer' modes of translation, with the proviso that in most - though not all - cases even the literal translators are prepared to follow their source text only so closely as the 'propriety' or the 'nature' of the target language will allow. The French translator Etienne de Courcelles, for example, uses the image in this sense in a letter of 1628 to Grotius: "I was so afraid of weakening your argument by straying from your words that I followed them closely throughout, as far as the propriety of our language would permit" ("j'ai eu tellement peur d'affoiblir vos argumens en m'esloignant de vos paroles, que je las ai suivi (sic) des près partout, autant que la propriété de nostre langue l'a peu permettre"; Zuber 1968:261). More liberal translators, on the other hand, frequently criticize their stricter colleagues for treading on their authors' heels, i.e. doing them an injustice by adhering too closely to their every word; the natural image is then that of following at a greater distance.⁹

Either way, though, the metaphor expresses the hierarchical relation between original and translation (front runner/follower, stronger/weaker) as well as the former's logical and chronological ascendancy over the latter. In addition, the references in both Vondel's statement and in De Courcelles' letter to the translator attempting not to "deviate" or "stray" from the original's path add a further opposition of 'free' versus 'confined' or 'bound'. In this respect the sense of confinement or of restricted freedom is obviously felt more strongly by the 'literal' translators (witness Vondel's 1620 preface: "...had we not wanted to tie ourselves more closely to the text"), but it is accepted even by such well-known 'free' translators as John Denham in England and Nicolas Perrot d'Ablancourt, the leading exponent of the so-called 'belles infidèles', in France. When, later in the century, Dryden feels he has to stake out his position with regard to the 'libertine' translators of the school of Denham and Cowley, he again emphasizes - by means of a different but equally apt metaphor - that the translator's freedom knows strict limits: it concerns matters of style and phrasing only, and should not encroach on the primacy of the original author's inventio ("it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author's words:...I suppose he may stretch his chain to such a latitude, but by innovation of thoughts, methinks he breaks it", 1680; Dryden ed. 1962, I: 272). Vondel's statement clearly represents the same moderate position - neither too strict nor too liberal, following the original as 'faithfully' as Dutch idiom will permit, but without significantly deviating from the substance of the source text. The impossible dilemma of translation that lies behind this compromise - a 'literal' rendering goes against the grain of the target language, but any deviation means a betrayal of the original text - is of course at least as old as Saint Jerome's letter to Pammachius at the end of the fourth century CE, and in Holland Huygens had reformulated it in the sharpest possible form in 1623.¹⁰ Vondel, however, takes the pragmatic view that a middle course is possible, and in his preface he leaves it to Grotius (*het Groote Vernuft*) to decide whether he has been successful in steering that course; he will have been gratified to hear that Grotius' reaction was indeed favourable (cf. Brandt ed. 1905: 62).

8

It is in the dedication to Maria Tesselschade of his translation of Sophocles' *Electra* (1639; III :641-43) that Vondel argues his practical approach to translation most fully, as here the need for the translator to take some liberties, and the recognition that translation takes place under literary as well as linguistic constraints, both come to the fore. The dedication contains the usual circumstantial information about how the Dutch text came into being - it was apparently suggested to Vondel by Victorijn, and Isaac Vos helped him with the Greek.¹¹ The key passage, however, runs as follows:

It is impossible to construct proper sentences if one keeps strictly to the Greek compound words, and does not dare to treat them with a certain degree of liberty. Rhyme and metre, which the translator has to observe, often also prevent him from rendering as well and as fully that which the original has so splendidly expressed; and pouring something from one language into another through a narrow bottleneck cannot be done without spilling.¹²

The issue that Vondel raises with regard to Greek compounds is nothing new. The growing interest in the vernacular during the second half of the sixteenth century had led several writers and linguists to claim that Dutch - or English for that matter - was on a par with or even superior to Greek in its ability to form compound words. In the Low Countries Spiegel, Stevin and others held this view (Van den Branden 1967: 173, 195), and Vondel will mention it again in his *Aenleidinge* of 1650 (V: 484); Sir Philip Sidney was among those who shared this opinion with regard to English (ed. 1962: 46). More broadly-based comparisons of this kind between two or more languages - which found their most

attractive visual expression in the polyglot Bibles and dictionaries of the second half of the sixteenth century - had also alerted writers and translators to the structural and idiomatic differences between languages, and hence to the undesirability, even the impossibility, of word-for-word translation. The notion of the incompatibility of different linguistic idioms is already present, for example, in Vives' *De ratione dicendi* (published in Louvain in 1533; cf. Coseriu 1971: 574, 579). Among translators into Dutch Nicolaus van Winghe had pointed out in the preface to his translation of Flavius Josephus (1552) that he had not been able to translate literally "because of the different ways of expression" of Latin and Dutch ("om der talen onghelijcheyt in manieren van spreken"; Van den Branden 1967:61), and three years later Cornelis van Ghistele's preface to his version of Terence had remarked that if Latin could not reproduce the "propriety" of Greek words ("de proprieteyt vande Griecxsche woorden"), neither could Dutch reproduce those of Latin words (*ibid.*:34). In subsequent decades statements of this type multiply rapidly, so that Vondel is only falling into line with a long tradition when he too recognizes that the differences between languages warrant a degree of liberty in the translator.

Interestingly, however, Vondel combines this linguistic constraint with a literary one, as he observes that the demands of rhyme and metre also militate against the literalist mode. The image he uses for this literary constraint is that of pouring through a narrow bottleneck. The description of translating as 'pouring' may be derived from the Latin term *transfundere*, which is used by Vives, among others (Vanderheyden 1980a: 133). It occurs among seventeenth-century English translators as well. John Healey's 'To the Reader', prefaced to his translation of Theophrastus (1616), admits that "by powring it out of the Latin into the vulgar, the great disproportion of Languages and abilities considered, it cannot but (by my unskilfulnesse) it hath taken some wind" (Lathrop 1933 :264). James Howell also employs the image in connection with translation (in a letter of 1632, published in 1645; Steiner 1975:146), and his French translator Baudoin observes likewise that translating is like decanting wine: some bouquet and quality is inevitably lost (cf. Zuber 1968: 88); Sir Richard Fanshawe and John Denham subsequently use it in the same vein (in 1647 and 1556; Fanshawe ed. 1964: 4; Steiner 1975: 65). Vondel, too, returns to it in his laudatory poem on Hendrik Bloemaert's Pastor Fido translation (1650; V: 522). The more specific image he employs here in the Elektra preface, of translation as pouring "through a narrow bottleneck" applies more particularly to the difficulties of translating in verse - Huygens too had remarked in his prefatory note of 1623 (cf. above, note 10) that the basic dilemmas of translation are always much more acute in verse than in prose. Although the exact provenance of Vondel's 'bottleneck' metaphor is unclear, it may have come to him through a very similar image in Seneca, who compares prose and verse in terms of ordinary speech on the one hand and the sound of a trumpet on the other: by being forced through a narrow tube the sound is amplified and gains in power and clarity (Verdenius 1941a: 91). Both Huygens and Vondel repeatedly draw on this image to describe the difference between prose and verse,¹³ and it is possible that Vondel saw the related image of the narrow bottleneck as a suitable metaphor for the particular difficulties raised by translating in verse.

The dedication of the Elektra translation of 1639 is remarkable for its clear and concise articulation of Vondel's awareness that the translation of a literary text has to take into account both the nature of the target language and the specific literary forms prevailing in the target literature; as both these constraints demand a degree of liberty on the translator's part, it is not surprising that here, for the first time, the notion of 'liberty' in translation is explicitly mentioned ("met een ruim geweten", "vrymoedigh").

9

The evolution of Vondel's ideas on translation up to this point is clear enough: it goes from a strictly 'literalist' to a noticeably freer mode, from a strongly source-oriented to a more target-oriented approach. It would be natural to expect this line of thought to be further elaborated in subsequent prefaces and dedications, but this is not what happens. Instead, when Vondel next comments on translation in any depth, in the dedication to Huygens of his prose version of Virgil's complete works (1646), we find what must be his most remarkable statement on the subject, in the shape of a peculiar defence of 'literal' translation, and of translating verse into prose for specific reasons.

The dedication (VI: 42-44) opens in conventional fashion with the announcement that this Latin poet "in Dutch dress" ("in het Nederduitsche kleet") is old and new at the same time. As it happens, the image of translating as dressing the original author in a new garment, probably the most common of all the metaphors for translation, fits into a whole series of images which all revolve around an opposition of 'outside' versus 'inside', or expression and substance, signifier and signified. Among the variants of the 'garment' and 'body' combination are such metaphorical oppositions as that between the husk and its kernel, the vessel and the liquid contained in it (as in the 'pouring' image, above), the chest and its contents, the casket containing a jewel, the body and the soul. All these metaphors imply that translation is a matter of changing merely the outward form, leaving the content, or the sense, of the source text intact - the underlying idea being

a conception of language in which 'expression' can be separated from 'content', so that translation is possible in principle by isolating 'form' from 'meaning' and granting absolute priority to the latter. This is indeed how Erasmus saw it,¹⁴ and in the preface to his version of Terence's *Andria* (1542) the noted French translator Charles Estienne characterized the translator in similar terms as "one who renders the meaning, the expression, the spirit of a given matter without constraint of language" ("ung traducteur, tel que les Graecz appelloient paraphraste, c'est-à-dire, qui rend le sens, la phrase, et l'esprit d'une matiere sans contrainte du langage"; Weinberg 1950: 90).

In the great majority of cases, however, these 'outside' versus 'inside' metaphors appear in a form stressing the 'poor' or 'coarse' outside versus 'rich' inside, preserving the fundamental dichotomy that renders translation possible, but clearly establishing the hierarchical relation between original and translated work. In a poem of 1654 Huygens sums up just about all the stock metaphors in this respect (body and soul, skin and body, casket and jewel, husk and kernel) in order to demonstrate that translation is able to preserve the essence undiminished, and that it is the rich inside, not the rough and worthless outside that matters (Huygens ed. 1892-99, V: 122-23). This is the way Vondel, too elaborates the image: Virgil's perfection will make good the imperfection of his new garment ("hier zal de man ... door zijn volmaecktheit d'onvolmaecktheit des kleets te baet komen"), the elegance of his figure and his movements will shine through the "simple and ordinary dress" ("oor het slechte en eenvoudige kleet hene), and the rough bark hides a noble nature (dat onder de ruwe schorsse een edele natuur verholen leit"; VI: 42).

After this conventional opening, Vondel goes into a lengthy justification of his decision to render Virgil's poetical works not in verse but in prose. The passage is worth quoting in full:

The Latinists will be less pleased with this translation than the Dutch, when they see how the Phoenix [i.e. Virgil] has lost here a good many of his shining feathers: for if, as some would claim, there is some secret of meaning or sound concealed beneath every word, syllable and letter, how much will then not be necessarily spoilt and lost due to the inequalities between the two languages, and their unequal nature and proprieties, and the differences in names and words, which are signs of the things they signify; also indeed in terms of the flowers and fragrance of eloquence - apart from the fact that verse and prose differ from each other like a trumpet blast and the unaided voice, and verse is like the sound of the voice being energetically forced through a trumpet with three coils. For this reason the translator would be better advised to render [Virgil] in rhyme and metre: but how many more feathers would he not have lost if his spirit had been squeezed and pressed into the narrow straits of rhyme and metrical feet, and from sheer need distorted and tampered with, and of necessity covered all over with the borrowed plumes of stopgaps for the sake of the verse. To put the translated text to rhyme without adding or taking away is scarcely possible, indeed impossible, and nearly always strays to a smaller or larger extent from what has been translated. So I saw no way of rendering him more accurately or more faithfully except in prose, so as to impress Maro's soul all the more directly on the Dutch reader, to serve him [i.e. the Dutch reader] better, and also the student of Latin, who may find the Latin more accessible when he sees the properties of the Roman tongue matched as closely as possible with our language, and the style and expression rendered as smoothly as possible.¹⁵

It is a remarkable argument that Vondel here presents. He begins by asserting that in Virgil's poetry there is "a mystery of meaning or sound concealed beneath every word, syllable and letter" - a reference, presumably, to the unbroken tradition of detailed and multi-layered exegesis and commentary of Virgil's poetry stretching from late Antiquity through the Middle Ages and right up to the Renaissance (cf. Comparetti 1895). The density of meaning which had been attributed to Virgil's texts through these numerous readings, would seem to foreclose any possibility of their being transferred to another medium, since translation inevitably means the replacement of the original "words, syllables and letters" with elements of another language, and hence the destruction of the unique texture of the Latin poems. Given the "difference" ("verschil") and "inequality" ("ongelijckheit") between Latin and Dutch, therefore, no degree of accuracy or literalism can save that texture, and so the translator has to resign himself to a considerable amount of loss. But Virgil's texts are also poems, and since verse is said to be a more powerful form of expression than prose, a verse translation would seem to be in order. However, as Vondel had come to recognize in previous comments on the subject, a translation in verse has its own drawback (it may be pointed out in passing that Vondel is apparently not thinking of a translation straight into verse, but of putting a prose crib to rhyme - which was indeed the usual practice): the demands of rhyme and metre would mean moving even further away from the letter of Virgil's text, thus greatly compounding the loss. But whether or not to translate into verse is a matter of choice, and this consideration finally prompts Vondel to sacrifice the 'literary' superiority of verse to the literal accuracy afforded by prose, and so he returns to his starting point: if it is true that Virgil's "soul" ("Maroos ziel") resides in the precise form of words of the Latin, then the nearest he can

get to that - and the only way to cut his losses and thus render the Dutch reader a genuine service - is by giving a Dutch prose version which mirrors the Latin idiom as closely as possible - although Vondel has clearly come a long way since his Du Bartas translations, for he immediately adds that he has also tried to translate "the style and expression" ("den stijl en rede") as smoothly as possible. As a final twist in the argument Vondel then seems to make a virtue out of necessity by claiming that the learner of Latin ("den Latynist") will benefit as well, since a translation as close to the Latin as this one can be put to good didactic use; he returns to this point at the end of the dedication, when he recommends his version not only to poets and orators, but to the Latin schools ("Latijnsche scholen") as well.

What we have, then, in Vondel's prose rendering of Virgil, is a conscious attempt to overcome the idiomatic differences between Latin and Dutch, a translation which sacrifices, as it were, poetry to linguistic structure. To this end Vondel showed great philological zeal, consulting a large number of different editions and commentaries (cf. Geerts 1932: 37ff.); the translation itself was the result of intense labour over several years (Smit 1975: 394). Needless to say, reactions by contemporaries differed considerably. In the preface to his line-by-line translation of Virgil Eclogues (1653), Hendrik Bruno spoke in glowing terms of Vondel's version as being "clear, lucid, unconstrained, thorough, concise, succinct, elegant, fluent, perfectly matching the Latin form of expression with the propriety of our language, and, in a word, unsurpassable" ("klare, duydelycke, onghedrongene, grondighe, bondighe, beknopte, aerdighe, vloeyende, de Latijnsche manier van spreekken seer wel op eygenschap van de onse draeyende, en om alles in een woordt te segghen, onverbeterlijcke vertalinghe"; Smit 1975: 630). As Vondel had expected, though, some other seasoned Latinists were not so pleased. Caspar Barlaeus dismissed the translation in a Latin letter of 1646 to Huygens as being "without life, without marrow, without strength" ("exanguem, exuccum, elumbem"), and there is reason to believe that Huygens himself, too, was far from delighted with the work Vondel had dedicated to him (cf. Verdenius 1941b).

However that may be, Vondel's prose Virgil remains a curious phenomenon - W.A.P. Smit even speaks of a "revolutionary deed" (1975:396). The point is that, although Vondel did translate verse into prose on other occasions, these versions were never intended for publication. The early Tasso translation remained in manuscript until the twentieth century. The prose translation of Horace from the early 1630s was made "as an honest pastime and exercise" ("tot een eerlijck tijtverdrif en oefeninge", VII: 262) and only appeared in print in 1654 because Vondel was unable to prevent an unauthorized edition (cf. above, note 3). Ovid's *Heroides*, which Vondel also rendered into prose, were never published during his lifetime and were printed only in 1716. According to the biographer Brandt, Vondel made a prose version of Seneca's *Hercules Furens* as well, again as an exercise, and it too remained unpublished (Brandt ed. 1905:63). On the other hand, as was mentioned above, it was common practice at the time to use a prose crib as a basis for a rhyming version, but Vondel gives no indication that his translation presents such a provisional crib, as Smit has also observed (1975: 387).¹⁶ On the contrary, the dedication's detailed argumentation aims precisely at justifying a prose translation in its own right, as the only feasible way to approximate as closely as possible the core of Virgil's work, his "soul", and hence his every turn of phrase.

Among the various possible reasons which Smit explores in order to explain Vondel's decision to publish a literal prose version of Virgil, he mentions the example of Hooft's very 'close' translation of Tacitus, and the more psychological speculation that after the failure of his 'Constantinade' Vondel may have developed a temporary dislike of the 'epic' alexandrine and turned to prose as a result (Smit 1975: 395-7). The argument based on Vondel's "epic impasse" (Smit's term), although conceivable, does not seem very likely and is hard to substantiate anyway. The example of Hooft's Tacitus is more persuasive, although Tacitus wrote prose in the first place, and Hooft only produced his 'literal' rendering at the express request of his brother-in-law Joost Baeck (cf. Brandt ed. 1932: 23; and his 1683 preface to the Tacitus translations in Hooft ed. 1972, vol.7, n.p.).

In the end, then, we appear to be left with Vondel's own justification as the main rationale behind the 'literalist' prose rendition of Virgil. It may be useful in this respect to give some more prominence to Vondel's reference to the "learners of Latin", who, he says, will profit from this form of translation. It is indeed possible to place Vondel's enterprise in two closely related traditions: on the one hand, the Humanist tradition of philological translation and annotation, and, on the other, a vernacular tradition of translations with a didactic goal. The first of these can be seen at work in the way classical Greek authors penetrated Western Europe in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries via Latin translations. Homer's *Iliad*, for instance, became available in a Latin prose version by Lorenzo Valla in 1474, the *Odyssey* in Latin prose renderings by Raphael Volterra in 1497 and by Gregorius Maxillus (or Uebelin) in 1510; in 1538 Andreas Divus published interlinear Latin versions of both works, and Casparus of Sankt Blasien produced a similar but bilingual version of the *Odyssey* in 1551 - in both these cases the intention was to stimulate the study of the Greek texts by means of the Latin interlinear (cf. Weevers 1934: 4). In fact, most Greek works to be found in sixteenth-century libraries in Western Europe were bilingual editions presenting the Greek text and a Latin crib on facing pages (Hepp

1968: 33; Stone 1974:68), and they were paralleled deep into the seventeenth century by an intensive production of philological annotations and interpretations. It was these Humanist commentaries and translations - often announced as 'accuratissima interpretatio', 'ad verbum', etc. - which provided the groundwork for subsequent versions in the vernacular, in the Low Countries as elsewhere (see, for example, Worstbrock 1976 for German, Hepp 1968 and Hutton 1980 for French, Lathrop 1933 for English, and the bibliography by Geerebaert 1924 for Dutch). As we saw above, Vondel's translations of Greek authors, too, relied heavily on Latin intermediaries. The vernacular tradition of didactic translations is in turn modelled on the Humanist one, and here as well the aim is to facilitate the learning of a foreign language by means of a 'literal' translation, whether in prose or as interlinear verse. Thus, in the Low Countries, the translator I.V.D.M.D.H. observes in the preface to his prose version (1638) of Guarini's *Pastor Fido* that his work is intended for learners of Italian ("de begheerighe tot het Italiaensch"). who have now been handed "a profitable instrument" ("eenen vruchtelijscken middel") in that the translator has "followed the words and sentences of the original in every respect or as far as was possible" ("als wesende het voor-schrift in woorden ende sinnen volkomentlijck oft immers soo veel mogelijck naerghevolght"; Verkuyll 1971: 256-57). Some later translations of the *Aeneid* have a similar purpose, even though they use verse: Roeland van Engelen's unfinished translation (Books I to VI, 1662) does so because, he claims, verse is more easily committed to memory (Smit 1975:614 - and Smit here points out that Van Engelen is apparently following the example of the bilingual Greek/Latin editions of Homer), and a year later Dirk Doncker provides line numberings in his translation in order to facilitate the comparison with the Latin ("om te vaardiger Vergilius in zyn Latijnsche vaarzen daar op te konnen naar zien"; *ibid.*: 626-27). Versions like these, clearly, do not even implicitly claim to 'replace' or 'be' the original work; on the contrary, they announce themselves in a more subservient and supporting role, as stepping-stones to the source text, taking the reader back to the foreign work instead of pretending to take its place.

It remains possible, of course, that Vondel's reference, in the 1646 dedication, to the usefulness of his prose translation for learners of Latin is little more than an afterthought. There is certainly no reason to doubt the primacy of his main argument, i.e. his attempt to approximate "Virgil's soul" through a literal rendering. But given the exceptional nature of the translation, his particular endeavour in this case becomes easier to comprehend when it is set in a context which includes the tradition of Humanist and didactic translations, where the literalist mode was probably more acceptable than in the normal run of seventeenth-century literary translations. In other words, even if Vondel's didactic intent is no more than a matter of making a virtue out of necessity, it still harmonizes surprisingly well with the main justification he is offering.

10

After the intriguing 1646 dedication, Vondel's later statements on translation add little that is new. In 1655 he publishes the *Ondergang van Troje*, the verse rendering of Book II of the *Aeneid*. The dedication to Peter Hooft de Graef (VI: 71-73) refers briefly to the earlier prose version of Virgil's complete work, but does not re-open the discussion about translating poetry into prose or verse. Having explained that he has always had a particular preference for the *Aeneid*'s Second Book and that the translation offered here is only a foretaste of more to come, Vondel goes into the personal benefits which translation yields as an exercise for the aspiring poet, who may learn his craft by imitating old masters - an observation he had also made a few years before in the *Aenleidinge* (1650), with the same analogy between the translator and the apprentice painter. In the final passage of the dedication, and in the poem which immediately follows it ('Aen den selven Heer', VI: 74-79), a series of by now familiar topoi serve to emphasize the inferiority of the translation vis-a'-vis the original work: the translated text "lags behind" its model, its colours are "faint and dull" (De verf te zwack en doof), its tones are low ("ons laege toonen"), it is at best an "echo" (*wee^rgalm*) of Virgil, whose name will make up for the roughness of the translation ("Wiens naem 't gebreck vergoet van mijnen ruwen stijl"; VI:79) - a point he repeats in the dedication, to Queen Christina of Sweden, of his psalm translations in 1657 ("De groote naem van David magh vergoeden / Wat hier ontbreekt aen 's dichters klanck, en maght"; VIII: 224). The poem 'Parnasloof' for Cornelis de Graeff, which prefaces the verse translation of Virgil's complete work in 1660, picks up some of these images and speaks of the translation as a faint echo and a weak reflection of the original (VI: 86).

In the prefaces and dedications accompanying the translations of Sophocles and Euripides that follow in the course of the 1660s, questions of translation are hardly touched upon at all, as Vondel is content to recall the unique importance and excellence of the Greek plays. It is only in the 'Loofwerk' for Diederik Buisero, which introduces the translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (*Herscheppinge*, 1671; VII: 376-83), that Vondel briefly reanimates the images of translation: his version, "sailing low to the ground", tries to follow Ovid "at a distance" ("Het luste ons hem.../ In zijne schaduw, laegh langs d'aerde, naer te zweven,/ Van ver te volghen"), and again the substance of Ovid's poem is said to

be far more valuable than iots present Dutch form (“en laet de stof,/ Veel kostelyker dan myn arbeit, u behaegen”) - although he does fit in a general warning that there are many who try their hand at translating, but few who can do it well (“Vertolcken staet elk vry, is ieder even na,/ Doch geensins even nut”), adding that if Ovid were able today to choose his translator, he would entrust his work only to a poet who was his equal (“Indien Ovidius quaem' 's levens licht t'aenschouwen,/ Hy zou zyn werkstuk slechts een' fenixtolk vertrouwen”; VII: 381). The whole tenor of Vondel's poem, of course, suggests that he does not for a moment regard himself as such a “fenixtolk”. As it is, the suggestion that the translation is the work of a true poet and hence in the same class as the original, is reserved for the more hyperbolic discourse of the laudatory poems. And just as in 1622 he had emphatically described Wessel van Boetselaer as a genuine poet (II: 430), Vondel writes a short poem in 1670 praising the Nil Volentibus Arduum translation of Plautus' *Menaechmi* (De gelijke Twe'lingen), intimating that the Dutch play is equal to the Latin, although it derives from it (“De Nee^rduitsch wil geen Plautus wijken./ Men kent den vader aen de vrucht”; X: 624).

Even in his - relatively few - complimentary poems on other translators and translations, however, Vondel is generally less lavish in his praise than some of his contemporaries. It is sufficient to compare, for example, his poems on the translations of Du Bartas by Zacharias Heyns (1621) and Baron Wessel van Boetselaer (1622) with those of Starter and Anna Roemers Visscher to appreciate Vondel's reserve. Both Starter and Anna Roemers refer to the Pythagorean notion of the migration of souls, or metempsychosis, to express their admiration. Starter explains that he can only comprehend Heyns' astonishing achievement by assuming that “Du Bartas' soul has passed into our Heyns” (“Wie sou dit wonderwerck my andersins verklaren,/ Als dat sijn siel sou sijn in onsen Heyns gevaren?”; Starter ed. 1864: 198); Anna Roemers makes the same assumption, but - ironically enough - about the other translator, when she exclaims: “Du Bartas lives!.../ O noble Baron, his spirit resides in you:.../ You are Du Bartas, or he was the same as you” (“Du Bartas leeft!.../ O edel Heer Baron, in u soo rust sijn geest:.../ Ghy zijt het selfs, of hy heeft u gelijck geweest”; Roemers Visscher ed. 1881, II: 109).¹⁷ Or compare the triumphant military imagery which Isaac Vos works into his verse in praise of Lion de Fuyter's version of *El Palacio Confuso* (*Carpioos Verwerde-Hof*, 1647), where the translator is seen as a “conqueror” and the author as a “captive” who should be pleased at being allowed to share in something which henceforth belongs wholly to the translator.¹⁸

11

On the whole, Vondel's reluctance to adopt the inflated rhetoric of such praise in his own congratulatory poems is matched by his unwillingness to raise the claims for translation in the prefaces and dedications. His immense respect for the Classical models, even in his 'original' work, is well known, and it is probably not accidental that the phrase about “sailing low to the ground” in translating Ovid also occurs, for example, in the dedication of *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637), with reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Vondel's respectful attitude towards the authority of the Ancients clearly contributes to his moderate stance in matters of translation, while the fact that nearly all his statements on the subject are ad hoc pronouncements means that he is usually too preoccupied with the immediate problems at hand to consider the issues from a broader perspective. On the other hand, his very moderation, and his apparent reliance on the conventional Renaissance discourse of translation with its telling images and metaphors, also make him a convenient starting point for further study of seventeenth-century conceptions of translation in the Low Countries. Vondel's own evolution as a translator, from the close adherence to the word-for-word principle in the early work to the clear articulation of linguistic and literary constraints in the dedication of *Elektra* in 1639, provides a tentative framework for considering other translators and their ideas. In addition, Vondel's purist concern, the emphasis on both the public and the private benefits of translation in terms of making valuable foreign works available and of providing useful stylistic exercise, his collaboration with others in producing translations, and the hierarchy of power and quality that he establishes between the original and the translated text, all these aspects invite comparison with similar concerns voiced by Vondel's fellow translators. Meanwhile, the peculiar approach to translating Virgil that he defends in the 1646 dedication of his prose rendering is likely to remain uniquely intriguing. But to say even that may be premature, for our ignorance of the field is such that any generalization, or calling anything unique, is hazardous at best.

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NOTES

- ¹ All references to texts by Vondel are to the Wereldbibliotheek edition of the collected work (see Bibliography).
- ² On the two manuscripts of Vondel's Tasso translation (the autograph in Leningrad and the neat copy, not in Vondel's hand, at Oxford), see Sterck 1918: 83-104, Nijland 1931, and Molkenboer 1950: 604-05.
- ³ According to Vondel's biographer Geeraard Brandt an unauthorized edition of the Horace translations (*Lierzangen en Dichtkunst*) was in press when Vondel heard of it; being unable to prevent publication he agreed to see it through and even wrote a preface for it (Brandt ed. 1905: 93). Brandt puts the date of the translations at 1635, but Geerts (1932: 27-30) suggests the early 1630s.
- The prose translation of Ovid's *Heroides*, which probably dates from around 1641 (Brandt ed. 1905:76; Geerts 1932: 33-34), was first published by David van Hoogstraten in 1716, some twenty years after the manuscript had been given to him by Geeraard Brandt's son Kaspar.
- ⁴ The idea that precious metals 'grow' organically in the soil was not uncommon, even as late as the seventeenth century. In fact, much of the endeavour of the alchemists to transmute base metals into gold as part of the Magnum Opus amounted to a search for ways to speed up this supposed natural process by artificial means (cf. Van Lennep 1984: 25).
- ⁵ "Hierom waer het geraden eerst eenige heilige of weereltsche historien, oock verzieringen, uit Virgilius, Ovidius, Amadis, en Bokadius, te rijmen, om zich van de rijmkunste meester te maecken, en op de baen te geraken Kennis van uitheemsche spraecken vordert niet weinigh, en het overzetten uit vermaerde Poëten helpt den aenkomenden Poet, gelijk het kopieeren van kunstige meesterstukken den Schilders leerling" (V: 485, 487-88).
- ⁶ "Hic situs est Phaëton currus auriga paterni / Quem si non tenuit, magnis tamen excidit ausis", which Vondel

translates as: “Alhier ligt Phaëton verslagen/ De Voerman van zyne vaders wagen:/ Die, of hem is den toom ontgaen,/ Nochtans heeft vry wat stouts bestaen” (II: 230).

⁷ See Jacques Peletier in the chapter on translation in his *Art poétique* of 1545: the translator is an 'imitator' in the full sense of the word, for in rhetorical terms he subjects himself not only to someone else's inventio but also to the dispositio and, as far as he can, to the elocutio of the original (“La plus vraie espèce d'Imitation, c'est de traduire.... Ainsi que fait le Traducteur qui s'asservit non seulement à l'Invention d'autrui, mais aussi à la Disposition: et encore à l'Elocution tant qu'il peut; Peletier ed. 1930: 105; I have modernized Peletier's spelling, TH).

⁸ Willem de Vreese first put the date of Vondel's autograph of the Tasso translation at either the period 1606-15 or 1635-49 (cf. Sterck 1918: 91); Aleida Nijland, who compared the Italian and Dutch texts in detail, suggested the first quarter of the seventeenth century, possibly the years 1618-25 (Nijland 1931: 20, 34).

⁹ See, for example, Dryden's comments on the 'strict' translators Holyday and Stapylton, in the 'Discourse Concerning ... Satire' of 1692: “We have followed our authors [i.e. Juvenal and Persius] at greater distance, tho' not step by step, as they have done. For oftentimes they have gone so close that they have trod on the heels of Juvenal and Persius, and hurt them by their too near approach. A noble author would not be pursued too close by a translator” (Dryden ed. 1962, II: 153).

¹⁰ Jerome, Letter 57 (to Pammachius): “If I translate word for word, the result sounds absurd; if, of necessity, I change something in the sentence structure or style, I give the impression of having abdicated the obligations of a translator” (“si ad verbum interpretor, absurde resonant; si ob necessitatem aliquid in ordine, in sermone mutavero, ab interpretis videbor officio recessisse”; Jerome ed. 1953: 61; he is here quoting from his own earlier preface to his translation of Eusebius).

Huygens, in the prefatory note ('Yet overgesetts. Voor-maningh') to his translation of fragments from Guarini's *Pastor Fido* (1623): “If one takes a certain liberty in translating, then the truth will be violated; if one keeps strictly to the words, then the spirit of what is said disappears” (“Neemtmen de ruymte in 't Oversetten, soo kan de waerheid niet vrij van geweld gaen: Staetmen scherp op de woorden, soo verdwijnt de geest vande uytspreeck”; Huygens ed. 1892-99, I: 284-850. In the *Korenbloemen*, though not in the manuscript, the prefatory note is followed by a Latin citation from Jerome, which includes the passage quoted above.

¹¹ The young Vos' command of Greek is a matter of dispute. According to Geeraard Brandt (ed. 1905: 69) he was “very proficient” (“zeer geoëffent”) in the language, but Geerts (1932: 9-10) thinks that claim is over-optimistic. Geerts also demonstrates Vondel's reliance on Latin editions of the Greek play and on a number of Latin philological commentaries; the latter point Vondel freely acknowledged himself (III: 642).

¹² “Oock is 't onmogelijck de redenen wel te binden, indien men gehouden zijnde de Griecsche koppelingen stip te volgen, niet met een ruim geweten wat vrymoedigh daer over heenen durf vaeren. Rijm en maet, waer aen de vertolcker gebonden staet, verhindert oock menighmael, dat de vertaelder niet zoo wel en volmaecktelijck naspreeckt, 't geen zoo wel en heerlijk voorgesproken word; en yet van d'eene tael in d'ander, door eenen engen hals te gieten, gaet zonder plengen niet te werck” (III: 642-43).

¹³ Verdenius refers to Vondel's short poem on Jan Vos and to the dedication of the prose translation of Virgil (cf. below, note 15), and to a passage in Huygens' *Zee-straet*. The image also occurs in Huygens' epigram 'Dichtens kracht' of 1668 (ed. 1892-9, VII: 202).

¹⁴ “Language consists of two parts, namely words and meaning which are like body and soul. If both can be rendered I do not object to word-for-word translation. If they cannot, it would be preposterous for a translator to keep the words and to deviate from the meaning” (Erasmus quoted in Schwarz 1955: 155).

¹⁵ “Den Latynen zal deze vertalinge min dan den Nederduitschen behagen, wanneerze zien, hoe de Fenix hier vry wat van zijne blinckende vederen gelaten hebbe: want indien, gelijk zommign drijven, onder elck woort lettergreep en letter eenige geheimnis van zin of klanck schuilt; wat moet 'er nootzaeckelijck door d'ongelijckheit der beide talen, en heuren ongelijcken aert en eigenschappen, en het verschil van namen en woorden, die tekens der betekende zaecken zijn. gespilt worden en verloren gaen, oock zelf aen bloemen en geuren van welsprekenheit; behalve dat dicht en on dicht, of vaers en onvaers onderling verschillen, gelijk trompetklanck en bloote stem, en het vaers een stem, door een driebochtige trompet krachtigh uitgewrongen, gelijk is. Hierom moght de vertolcker liever Augustus Hofzwaan in rijm en op maet leeren opzingen: maer hoe veel meer had'er de Mantuaen van zijn vederen moeten laten, indien men zijnen geest door benaetheit van voeten en rijm bestont te prangen en te knijpen, en uit verlegenheit te rucken, te plucken, en ter noot doorgaens met geleende pluimen van rijm-en-noodige stopwoorden te decken. Het vertaelde te rijmen, zonder afdoen of

toedoen, is qualijck mogelijk, ja onmogelijck, en dwaelt meest al min of meer af van het vertalede. Ick zagh hem dan niet nader nochte eigentlijcker dan door onvaerzen en onrijm uit te beelden, om den Nederlander te levendiger Maroos ziel in te boezemen, hem te beter te dienen, en met een den Latynist, wien het Latijn nu misschien smaeckelijcker wil vallen, wanneer hy d'eigenschappen der Roomsche met onze moederlijcke spraecke zoo na overeen gebroght, en den stijl en rede zoo vlack en effen gevlijt ziet, als my mogelijk was." (VI: 43-44).

¹⁶ Having made this point, however, Smit subsequently - and inconsistently, to my mind - goes on to treat the prose version as if it were intended after all as a preparation for the 1660 verse translation, qualifying his earlier statement about the "revolutionary" nature of the 1646 prose version by saying that it was revolutionary only to the extent that Vondel decided to publish it (1975: 400). The inconsistency becomes apparent when Smit states on the same page that Vondel repeated his "revolutionary deed" with the publication of the prose translation of Horace's works in 1654 - but this translation, like the prose renderings of the *Heroides* and of *Hercules Furens*, was originally intended meely as a private exercise and not for publication, and it was not afterwards put to rhyme. The two cases are not really comparable, and there is no reason to assume that the prose Virgil of 1646 was not intended as a separate translation in its own right, independent of the 1660 verse translation.

¹⁷ In a recent essay L. Strengholt (1984) discussed a reference to the Pythagorean notion of metempsychosis in an early poem by Hooft, mentioning parallel occurrences in Van Mander and several foreign writers. At the end of the essay he speculated that the idea of metempsychosis might well be used as a form of praise for translators. He was right, as the above quotations from Starter and Anna Roemers indicate. In addition to these, the notion may also be found in Jeremias de Decker's complimentary poem on Westerbaen's translation of the *Aeneid* (1662: "Als waere Maroos geest verhuist in Westerbaen"; De Decker ed. 1726, II: 214), and, although in a somewhat different context, in the publisher C.L. van den Plasse's comment (1638) on Bredero's *Moortje* in relation to Terence ("Het scheen dat de Gheest van Terentius (soo men Pitagoras verscheppingen ghelooft) in hem vervormt was, dat wijst sijn Moortjen ende andere spullen wel uyt"; cf. Grootes 1983: 470).

¹⁸ "...be content, Lope,/ To follow with quick strides / Your conqueror, who will share with you / The praise for the Confused Court./ Be glad, Vega, who are his captive / By law of arms, that he is prepared / To share with you that which is wholly his" ("Nu Lopes zijt te vreen,/ En volght met fluxe schreen / Uw' winnar, die met uw' het lof / Sal deelen, van 't verwarde Hof./ O! vega uw' verblijt,/ Die sijn gevanghen zijt / Door krijghs-recht, dat hij rechtevoort / Uw' deelt, 't geen hem heel toebehoort"; De Fuiter 1647: 3). *El Palacio Confuso* is in fact not by Lope de Vega, as Vos and De Fuiter erroneously assumed (and I with them, cf. Hermans 1985: 110), but by Antonio Mira de Amescua (cf. Van Praag 1922: 75).