



# *Foreign credit: travel writing and authenticity in the dutch translation of The memoirs and travels of Mauritius Augustus, Count de Benyowsky (1790)*

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## Foreign Credit

### Travel Writing and Authenticity in the Dutch Translation of the *Memoirs and Travels of Mauritius Augustus, Count de Benyowsky* (1790)

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#### Abstract & Keywords

##### English:

This article explores the translation and reception of the *Memoirs and Travels* (1790) of Count Mauritius Augustus Benyowsky (1746-86) in the Netherlands, and examines the complications, tensions and problems that transfer between a major and a more minor European language involves. I analyse how the Dutch translator Petrus Loosjes Adriaanszoon positioned himself as a mediator between these very different source and target cultures and ask how he dealt with the problems of plausibility and 'credit' which had beleaguered the reception of the *Memoirs and Travels* from the outset. In this article I am concerned to restore minority languages to the discussion of how travel literature circulated in Western Europe at the close of the eighteenth century and to demonstrate how major/minor language translation was central to the construction of Dutch-language culture in the Low Countries in this period.

**Keywords:** travel writing translation, 18th-century travel writing, 18th-century dutch book market, mauritius augustus benyowsky, petrus loosjes adriaanszoon, william nicholson

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## 1. Introduction

Early in 1790, the *Memoirs and Travels of Mauritius Augustus Count de Benyovskyy* [sic], *Magnate of the Kingdoms of Hungary and Poland*, appeared on the British book market with the London publisher Robinsons. Its lengthy subtitle 'Consisting of his Military Operations in Poland, his Exile into Kamchatka, his Escape and Voyage from that Peninsula through the Northern Pacific Ocean, Touching at Japan and Formosa, to Canton in China, with an Account of the French Settlement he was Appointed to Form upon the Island of Madagascar' gave a clear idea of the ambitious geographical range of the work, as much as it gestured towards the political motivations underlying part of the travels undertaken by Mauritius Augustus Benyowsky (1746-86). A piece that excited and exasperated its readers by turns, the *Memoirs and Travels* was a work that met with mixed reviews in the British press. 'In reading the Life and Adventures of Count Benyowsky', noted a critic in *The European Magazine, and London Review* for July 1790, 'the imminent dangers from which he miraculously escaped, the long and frequent sufferings he endured, the savage cruelty of his oppressors, and the total disregard of every moral sentiment which marks his own character, excite the alternate emotions of astonishment and pity, of indignation and contempt' (Anon. 1790a: 33). Indeed, the critic continued, 'were it not for the testimonies which Mr. *Nicholson*, the editor and translator of this narrative, has judiciously inserted respecting its authenticity, it would have been impossible to give credit to so extraordinary and uncommon a series of events' (Anon. 1790a: 33). But as the critic in the *Analytical Review* succinctly put it, 'it would be injustice not to confess, that we have seldom met with a more entertaining production' (Anon 1790b: 392), and indeed it was the very readability of Benyowsky's work that would ensure its popularity. Over the next couple of decades the *Memoirs* appeared in German (Berlin and Leipzig, 1790), Dutch (Haarlem, 1791), French (Paris, 1791), Swedish (Stockholm, 1791), Danish (Copenhagen, 1797), Polish (Warsaw, 1797) and Slovak (Pressburg, 1808). The *Memoirs* would go on to inspire a tradi-

comedy by the German dramatist August von Kotzebue, which appeared in German in 1794 and in translation in Britain in 1798. Dramatic representations of Benyowsky's adventurous life were still being performed in Drury Lane several decades later, with James Kenney's *Benyowsky; Or, The Exiles of Kamschatka* put on and reviewed in the popular press in 1826 (Anon. 1826: 205-6).

The international acclaim won by Benyowsky's travelogue is unsurprising. Firstly, it was a spirited account of naval hardship, exile and daring escape from subterranean imprisonment, with a love affair and a little cross-dressing thrown in for good measure, that did indeed make it an entertaining read, well suited to the general public. Secondly, it described travel to far-flung reaches of the globe – notably Japan and Madagascar – which had hitherto been little documented by European travellers. While the subject matter itself was therefore of great interest to a European reading public, it was precisely the rip-roaring nature of Benyowsky's account that drew suspicion. As Percy G. Adams has noted of this 'notorious' voyager, Benyowsky was highly self-promotional, placing himself at the centre of action, adventure and attraction in the *Memoirs*: his vanity allied him with other travellers such as the Franciscan Father Louis Hennepin, and his sentimentality placed him in the tradition of Laurence Sterne (Adams 1962: 82). But it was not only the narrative style which would have given more critical readers pause. The very language of the *Memoirs* would also have fostered doubts among some readers about the authenticity of the account. Despite the phrase 'Written by Himself' appearing in block type on the title-page of the *Memoirs* (and thus reinforcing the non-fictional claims of the account), Benyowsky's travelogue did not appear in the French, his main language of communication, and was essentially published on his behalf by his English translator, the chemist and writer on natural philosophy William Nicholson (1753-1815). Working from a French manuscript which would only appear *after* the English, Nicholson was at great pains to stress the authenticity of a rendering which could not, initially, be compared with the original manuscript version of the source text that had been delivered to the British Museum for safekeeping. Conscious of this rather strange state of affairs, Nicholson diligently appended material from other sources to confirm a range of details presented in the account. This included a fifteen-page 'Postscript' containing papers from none other than the famous botanist and explorer Sir Joseph Banks, President of the Royal Society. Such 'collateral evidence', as Nicholson termed it in a feisty seventeen-page 'Editor's Preface', offered the 'mutual coincidence of facts' by which the author's fidelity could be judged (Benyowsky 1790: iii).

If the centrality of Benyowsky's standing in the world of letters was doubted by some, his Dutch translator Petrus Loosjes Adriaanszoon (1735-1813) certainly occupied a 'decentred' position, working from the dominant idiom of English into a language with far fewer claims to significance on a European or international level. Pascale Casanova has suggested that such 'small' languages can generally be classified in four different ways – those lacking literary capital since they are primarily used orally, those of recent creation, those with relatively few speakers and those of broad diffusion with great internal literary traditions which are nonetheless largely unrecognized in the international marketplace (Casanova 2004: 256-7). Dutch could indeed be seen as a 'small' or 'minor' language in this context, since although by the 1790s it could look back on a relatively important history and was a language of culture and tradition, it could also be categorised as belonging to that group of languages 'unrecognized outside their national boundaries, which is to say unvalued on the world literary market' (Casanova 2004: 256). As Itamar Even-Zohar has noted, since peripheral literatures tend to be identical with the literatures of smaller nations, certain hierarchical relations have been established which determine the dynamics of cultural and textual transfer (Even-Zohar 1990: 48). Within the 'polysystem' of interrelated literary systems, traffic is more likely to occur from the larger cultures towards the more minor ones, while dominant literatures and cultures often determine the modes and models adopted across literature internationally. Translation is, of course, central to the movement of literature between languages and cultures. For such 'peripheral' literatures, translation 'is not only a major channel through which fashionable repertoire is brought home, but also a source of reshuffling and supplying alternatives' (Even-Zohar 1990: 48).

In this article I shall be focusing in particular on the Dutch translation of Benyowsky's *Memoirs* as I explore how the text shifted from the dominant idiom of English to this minor language and the tensions or challenges which this provoked. The translation appeared between 1791 and 1792 as the four-volume *Gedenkschriften en Reizen des Graaven van Benyowsky* with the influential Mennonite bookseller Adriaan Loosjes in the Dutch city of Haarlem. Completed by Adriaan's father Petrus Loosjes Adriaanszoon 'naar de Engelsche vertaaling', it was indeed based on Nicholson's version rather than the French pre-text.[1] But despite the fact that English was the 'dominant' idiom, both in the sense that it was a 'major' language and Dutch a more 'minor' one,

and because it was the language of the authoritative, published, text, Petrus Loosjes did not feel compelled to adhere slavishly to the *Memoirs*. Rather, he cut and reshaped them for a Dutch audience, adopting what Lawrence Venuti has termed a 'regime of domestication' that reconstitutes the foreign text 'in accordance with values, beliefs and representations that pre-exist it in the target language, always configured in hierarchies of dominance and marginality' (Venuti 1993: 209). As I explore in this article how Loosjes restyled Benyowsky's account for publication in Haarlem, I shall start by reflecting on why the *Memoirs* would have been of interest to a late eighteenth-century Dutch-speaking audience and how this work supplemented existing travel literature in Dutch on those parts of the world that Benyowsky treated. I then contextualise Petrus Loosjes's translation work within the specific context of the Loosjes publishing house, prominent in the transmission of European ideas in the Dutch Republic, before I explore in the main body of this article the changes that Petrus Loosjes wrought to present the *Gedenkschriften* to a Low Countries reading public.

## 2. Benyowsky's *Memoirs*: Origins and Afterlives

If eighteenth-century British critics queried the veracity of the *Memoirs*, they were unconcerned, as Percy G. Adams has noted, about perpetuating a number of untruths in Benyowsky's biography, which were only unmasked at the end of the nineteenth century (Adams 1962: 83). Born in 1746 (not 1741) in what is now Slovakia, Benyowsky served as an army officer (so he claimed) during the Seven Years War. In 1769 he joined the Polish Confederation, fighting for the independence of Poland from Russian rule in the Ukraine. In 1770 he was captured and imprisoned by the Russians and exiled to Kamchatka in eastern Siberia. In a daredevil act, he escaped from prison and commandeered a battleship which he had captured together with other Polish prisoners. With this crew he set out on a voyage of exploration through the Northern Pacific several years before James Cook or Jean-François de La Pérouse would do, journeying along the Aleutians and Alaska to Japan and Formosa (Taiwan), until he finally anchored with his band of rebels in Macau in July 1771. He travelled to France in 1772 to propose the establishment of a French colony either on Formosa (Taiwan) or Madagascar. King Louis XV appointed him Governor of Madagascar and in early 1774 Benyowsky landed on the island. Conflict with the governors of the neighbouring French colonies of Réunion and Mauritius meant that his plans for the colonial development of Madagascar were continually thwarted and he eventually returned to France. After journeys to America and Hungary, he turned to Britain for the recognition which he felt that his expeditions and colonial exploits had deserved, and to ask the British government to grant him money for an expedition to Madagascar. He gave his memoirs, written in French, to John Hyacinth de Magellan, a member of the Royal Society and descendent of the great Ferdinand Magellan, who made a substantial financial contribution towards its translation and publication. While Benyowsky may have hoped that this connection with the British scientific establishment would enable him to gain greater favour than he enjoyed from the French, Magellan died in 1790 and it fell to Nicholson, himself a respected writer on scientific issues who was part of Magellan's intellectual circle, to publish Benyowsky's manuscript.

The *Memoirs*, which were comprised of three parts in the French, but published as two volumes in the English, was essentially composed of thirty-eight chapters charting the Count's travels from Poland, through Siberia to the Kamchatka Peninsula in the far east of Russia, before sailing towards the Kuril Islands on the very edge of the North Pacific Ocean and then on to Canton in China. The final part of the French version (and the last three quarters of the second English volume) was styled less as a linear travel narrative. Rather it presented a collection of memoirs and ministerial letters which described the observations Benyowsky had made on the island of Madagascar and the responsibilities accorded to him by the French government. The focus thus shifted in this last section from Benyowsky's lively descriptions of dog-sleds and fur traders in Siberia, through his swash-buckling battles, hostage-taking with fellow exiles and narrative of escape, to more formal documentation describing the commercial, political and cultural preoccupations related to French colonial expansion. For British readers, then, Benyowsky's account provided an interesting account for comparison of the ways in which European colonisation could be put into practice. As Chris Rojek and John Urry remind us by drawing productive parallels between the travelling of cultures and the travelling of peoples, the viewing of other cultures also enabled travellers to reinforce their own cultural attachments and to revisit 'former colonies which demonstrate the benign effects of empire' (Rojek and Urry 1997: 12). While Benyowsky's account of attempts to settle Madagascar only portrayed this French imperial project in its very earliest stages (Madagascar did not become a full formal French protectorate until 1890 and a colony in 1896), this aspect was to prove of interest to British readers with expansionist political and commercial agendas. Indeed, the English

geographer and artillery officer Samuel Pasfield Oliver, who edited the 1893 edition of Benyowsky's *Memoirs*, owed his expertise on the region to British colonial activity in this part of the world. In the closing pages of the *Memoirs*, in which Benyowsky described the colonisation of Formosa (now Taiwan), he listed succinctly twelve points he considered essential in the establishment of a colony, running from the need for early reflection on whether the colony should be established on a mercantile or military footing, to the encouragement of diligence amongst citizens rather than a craving for luxury, the establishment of a code of laws that favoured slavery and, finally, to the need for population expansion not through libertinism but respectable matrimony (Benyowsky 1790: 65-67). Reviewers were generally rather reticent to comment on the closing sections of the *Memoirs* – the *Monthly Review* simply noted that the 'remainder of the second volume consists of his correspondence with the French ministry, memoirs, particulars relating to the island, with other papers mentioned in his relation' (Anon. 1790b: 174) – but its starkly factual style, after the wildly adventurous pages that preceded it, clearly made it a less engaging text.

### 3. Travel Writing and Translation in the Loosjes Publishing House

The translation from the English into Dutch of Benyowsky's *Memoirs* by Loosjes, working from Nicholson's London edition, was not an unusual undertaking. Rather, it reflected trends in the Netherlands in the late eighteenth century towards using Anglophone source material – primarily popular prose, but also scientific and philosophical works – to expose a Dutch reading public to wider currents in European thought, literature and society. Loosjes production of a 'relay' translation – working not from the original but from a translation – was not uncommon either. Luc Korpel reminds us that texts were often also introduced to Dutch readers via a circuitous route, so that up to the first half of the eighteenth century, English dramas (not least the works of Shakespeare) were often translated from the French into Dutch, rather than directly from the original (Korpel 1993: 16). While around the middle of the eighteenth century, French was the main source language from which translations were made, in the second half of the eighteenth century a knowledge of German and, to a lesser degree, English, became more widespread: indeed English was primarily learnt by those belonging to the community of Dissenters, keen to understand the contents of religious tracts published in Britain (Korpel 1993: 6). Indeed, in the last quarter of the 1700s, the proportion of French translations decreased markedly, from around 50 per cent in 1600-1770 to around twenty per cent by the start of the nineteenth century (Hermans 2001: 397). As Giles Barber notes, it was not only through translation that Dutch readers became acquainted with English-language texts. An energetic import and export market between England and the Netherlands in the 1750s and 1760s meant that books were also available in their original Dutch in London, and in English in The Hague (Barber 1977: 50). By the second half of the 1760s, as Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), *Clarissa* (1748) and *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753), and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) and *Amelia* (1751) were stealing the hearts of British readers, they were also appearing in their original English on Dutch booksellers' shelves. Indeed, Barber observes that both major writers 'were by then available in either French or Dutch, but it is an interesting proof of the more firmly established popularity of English literature that English language editions were then required' (Barber 1982: 83).

While some Low Countries readers would have read Benyowsky's *Gedenkschriften* in the first published language, English – a report in the *Algemene Konst- en Letter-Bode* [*General Messenger of Art and Literature*] of 1790 on the initial appearance of the work in London shows that Nicholson's rendering did not go unnoticed (Anon. 1790c: 43) – the market for travelogues translated from the English was clearly expanding rapidly. In 1793, just a couple of years after the *Memoirs* had appeared in Dutch, the Loosjes publishing house was advertising Joseph Townsend's *Reize door Spanje, gedaan in de jaren 1786 en 1787* (1792-93), which had originally appeared as *A Journey through Spain in the Years 1786 and 1787* (1791), William Robertson's *Geschiedkundig onderzoek wegens de kennis, die de ouden hadden van Indie* (1793) from the 1792 original *An Historical Disquisition concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients had of India*, as well as the Scottish physician John Moore's *Dag-verhaal geduurende zyn verblyf in Frankryk* (1794) which had appeared as the *Journal during a Residence in France* in 1793. Translations from the German, noticeably fewer, included the German-Danish scholar Friedrich Münter's *Berichten van Napels en Sicilien byeen verzameld op eene reis, gedaan in de jaaren 1785 en 1786* [Reports of Naples and Sicily Collected on a Journey, Undertaken in the Years 1785 and 1786] (1791) based on the *Nachrichten über beide Sizilien* [Account of Both Sicilies] (1790) and Johann Jacob Grabner's *Brieven over de Nederlanden* [Letters Concerning the Netherlands] (1792) which had been translated 'uit het Hoogduitsch' from the original *Ueber die vereinigten Niederlande; Briefe* [On the United Netherlands; Letters] that had appeared the same year. Non-fictional travel writing must have

proved a lucrative business for Loosjes' publishing house, which would develop this specialism into the nineteenth century, going on to produce a Dutch rendering (1808-18) of parts of Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland's account of their travels to South America and an 1814 edition of Matthew Flinders' travelogue of his journey to Australia. While the period in which these accounts were appearing in the Netherlands also coincided with a sharp increase in the popularity of domestic tourism – Adriaan Loosjes himself penning *Hollands Arkadia of wandelingen in de omstreken van Haarlem* [*Dutch Arcadia or Walks in the Environs of Haarlem*] (1804-5) – sufficient curiosity could be piqued amongst Dutch readers to enjoy the delights of armchair travel to the most exotic of destinations.[2]

This increased interest in translating geographical-historical accounts or travelogues from English into Dutch was reflected not only in what publishers found to be saleable but also in the works that Petrus Loosjes himself brought out onto the market. His translation career appears to have been launched a good fifteen years before he started work on Benyowsky. Already in the 1770s he was translating the Scottish historian William Robertson's *The History of America* (1777) and *The History of Scotland* (1759) as the *Geschiedenis van Amerika* (1778) and the *Geschiedenis van Schotland* (1779), as well as the Swiss traveller Marc Theodore Bourrit's *Description des glaciers de Savoye* [*Description of the Glaciers of Savoy*] (1773) as the *Reize naar de Ysbergen van Savoye* (1778). The 1780s were a prodigious decade for Petrus Loosjes as he produced John Moore's *Eene Beschouwing der Maatschappij en Zeden in Frankryk, Zwitserland, Duitschland en Italie* (1780) from the original *A View of Society and Manners in France, Switzerland and Germany* of that same year and the Italian sequel *A View of Society and Manners in Italy* (1781), and nine volumes of William Coxe's *Beschouwing der Maatschappij en Zeden in Polen, Rusland, Zweden en Denemarken* [*Travels into Poland, Russia, Sweden and Denmark*] (1788-91).[3] Petrus Loosjes was still translating at a ripe old age, producing a Dutch version 'uit het Engelsch' (presumably working from the 1802 London edition published by Mawman) of the Italian naturalist Giuseppe Acerbi's travels through Sweden, Finland and Lapland, to the North Cape, which appeared as the *Reizen door Zweeden en Finland, tot aan de uiterste Grenzen van Lapland* in 1804. Loosjes therefore had few qualms about not working directly from the source text, but rather used indirect translation via English to enable him to make this work accessible to a Dutch-speaking public.

Petrus Loosjes' particular interest in working with English texts may have been informed by his own professional choices. Schooled in the classical languages, he rapidly developed an interest in literature and the arts which caused him to turn away from studying medicine, as his father would have wished, towards theology. By 1762 he had become a teacher in the Doopsgezinde Gemeente [Baptist Congregation] in Haarlem and his sermons were said to be influenced by the English style of his British counterparts (Anon. 1813: 359). He was presumably inspired by those theologians on whose writing he also drew in the natural theological work he published, notably *De Beschouwingen van de Werken der Natuur ten opzichte van viervoetige Dieren enz. ter betooging van Gods Magt, Wysheid en Goedheid* (1768) [*Observations on the Works of Nature in Relation to Quadrupeds etc. as a Demonstration of God's Power, Wisdom and Goodness*], based on John Ray's *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of the Creation* (1691), his translations of the Scottish minister Robert Findlay's *A Vindication of the Sacred Books and of Josephus, Especially the Former, from Various Misrepresentations and Cavils of the Celebrated M. de Voltaire* (1770) as the *Verdediging der Heilige Schriften en van Josephus tegen de Voltaire* (1773) and the Anglican Richard Watson's sermon 'Reasons for Retaining Christianity' as the *Brieven ter verdediging van de Voortplanting des Christlyken Godsdiensts* (1779).

Wijnand Mijnhardt reminds us that the Mennonites (*Menisten* or *Doopsgezinden*) belonged to a cultural elite in the Netherlands and were 'the great architects of the new cultural infrastructure created in the second half of the eighteenth century': indeed, their role as editors, journalists and founders of cultural and scientific societies far exceeded their proportion in the population (Mijnhardt 2000: 398). They played a crucial role in circulating the works of English and Scottish Enlightenment thinkers throughout the Dutch Republic, and, Mijnhardt suggests, their 'many cultural initiatives played a crucial role in the establishment of a vernacular and nationally oriented cultural communication community in the Dutch Republic in the second half of the eighteenth century' (Mijnhardt 2000: 398). The sheer volume of works that Petrus Loosjes put into Dutch clearly suggests that he belonged in this intellectual vanguard, given his significant role in the European dissemination of religious works and travel writing for a Haarlem public. As one contemporary noted, he was undoubtedly a promoter of Enlightenment values ('een voorstander van de verlichting'), even if he was also considered a great patriot – 'een hartelyk beminnaar van zyn vaderland' (Anon. 1813: 362). Petrus Loosjes' son Adriaan, who would likewise establish a

reputation as a key figure in the Mennonite community of Haarlem, was also devoted to the dissemination of knowledge, albeit in more tangible ways through his profession as a bookseller: he also understood citizenship as a particularly patriotic phenomenon and was energetically engaged, together with other Dissenters, in ensuring that conditions – not just intellectual – within their city were improved (Lantink 2000: 126).

It would be important to understand Petrus Loosjes' translation work within the context of a growing assertiveness on the part of Dutch writers in the late eighteenth century, concerned to increase the cultural standing of their language and culture against what they considered to be increasing domination from outside. As Lucretia Korpel reminds us, after 1750 translation was no longer seen by some as an activity that was necessary in extending the corpus of Dutch-language literature available to Low Countries readers. Rather, it was considered a threat to the native language and culture (Korpel 1992: 49). Criticism of the quality of translations, combined with scepticism about the real value of the original texts themselves, would have compelled more astute translators to think carefully about which travelogues they translated and how they presented them to the home audience. As Korpel demonstrates, reviewers from the 1760s through to the 1790s were incensed about the introduction of what they considered 'poor' translations into Dutch for a number of different reasons: these translations debased the Dutch language through their borrowing of foreign terms, they introduced inferior texts into the Dutch-language corpus and, perhaps most worryingly of all, they exposed Low Countries readers to inappropriate ideas from outside (Korpel 1992: 54). Indeed, these excessive translation activities – this 'vertaalwoede' – meant that authors and translators (and readers) spent their time with foreign writing, which led to the neglect of their own language and culture. Such conservatism was, however, countered by the recognition that translation could in fact contribute to the promotion of Dutch language and culture by encouraging others to imitate or improve upon what had been translated, that it might indeed enrich the Dutch language through contact with other tongues and that translation gave readers a useful insight into foreign customs and manners (Korpel 1992: 61). Given that the Mennonites were 'the main protagonists of the new idea of citizenship that dispensed with traditional, exclusive, legal and religious foundations and for which virtue and knowledge were the only prerequisites' (Mijnhardt 2000: 398), it would surely have been this interest in learning more of foreign peoples and climes which would have motivated Loosjes to put Benyowsky's travelogue into Dutch.

#### **4. (In)visibility, Plausibility and Credit**

In its discussions of Benyowsky's writing, scholarship is still, to this day, teasing out fact from fiction: Vilmos Voigt reminds us that in recent Hungarian encyclopaedias, Benyowsky continues to be remembered as a figure who 'made false claims not only orally, for the attainment of his aims; there is much deliberate falsification, distortion of the facts, exaggeration and plagiarism also in printed "works" associated with his name' (Voigt 2007: 206). Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová, charting the archival material relating to Benyowsky scattered across the globe, demonstrates how twenty-first century researchers are still trying to assess the essential historicity of certain claims Benyowsky made about himself in the *Memoirs* and to 'examine some of his adventures and accomplishments in the light of available, newly discovered or hitherto unused or not properly appreciated, archival sources' (Pawliková-Vilhanová 2000: 165). Such concerns are not, of course, specific to modern scholarship. Nigel Leask has shown how central the notion of plausibility and 'credit' was to eighteenth-century travel writing. James Bruce, writing in the same year that Nicholson's rendering of Benyowsky's *Memoirs* appeared, listed in the preface to his *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (1790) the scientific instruments which accompanied him on his travels, as what Leask terms a 'talismanic guarantee of the veracity of his narrative' (Leask 2002: 71). Not every traveller could, however, draw on the guarantees of quantitative precision afforded by scientific instrumentation, and those *bona fide* voyagers who wished to assure their readers of the authenticity of their accounts were compelled to use a 'literary' technology of assurance through eye-witness account, imaginatively engaging description and modest, disaffected narration. In the case of the *Memoirs*, the concerted efforts of Nicholson and Benyowsky produced a narrative that ranged across all these different modes of presentation. The Dutch account was, however, really rather different. In what follows I shall start by looking at the changes of a greater order that Petrus Loosjes brought to the translation, before I explore how he made slightly more subtle alterations to the text in Dutch translation, and what kind of readership he had in mind as he did so. In so doing I shall therefore also be demonstrating how Loosjes refused to adopt a marginal, deferent position towards the 'dominant' English rendering from which he was working. In Lawrence Venuti's terms, then, I am interested in seeing translation as a form of disruption and of resistance to the superiority of the dominant-language text (Venuti 1995: 203).



In his six-page translator's preface, Loosjes was keen not only to justify why he had undertaken the translation in the first place, but also to describe the alterations which he had made in reworking it for a Dutch reading public. Noting in the opening lines the 'veelvuldigheid en vreemdheid van Lotgevallen, en zonderlingheid van Character' [frequency and strangeness of the adventures and the eccentricity of character] which invite the curiosity of the reading public, and stressing how the exotic nature of Benyowsky's account appealed by detailing events that had taken place in a rarely visited place – 'in eenen schaars bezogten oord' – Loosjes immediately stressed the novelty value of the piece (Benyowsky 1791: 1,i). Having briefly sketched the Count's itinerary, Loosjes then highlighted the mediated nature of the rendering from which he was working, quoting at length Nicholson's explanation regarding the origins of the account and the location of the French manuscript in London. The detailed preface, in which the English editor had collected material in support of the veracity of the account, was now placed at the end of the Dutch translation, thus making the paratextual material seem less defensive and not immediately raising the spectre of implausibility in the mind of the Dutch reader. But greater changes were to be found elsewhere in the text. For reasons of cost, the illustrations from the two weighty tomes of the English *Memoirs* had been cut. As the translator also noted:

Verder zyn wy te raade geworden, om het Werk eenigzins, zonder benadeeling van den weezenlyken inhoud, te bekorten; bestaande die bekortingen, voornaamlyk, in op den Zeetocht uit te laten de dagelyksche Scheepsberigten, zo dezelve niets behelsden, 't geen op zich zelve gewigtig was, of vervolgens te passe kwam, en voorts de breedvoerige oorspronglyke stukken gewisseld tuschen den Graaf en de *Fransche* Staatsdienaaren, Madagascar betreffende. (Benyowsky 1791: v)

[We have, moreover, decided to shorten [the work somewhat, without detriment to the essential contents; these abridgements principally consist of omitting the daily nautical reports in the sea passage, where they contained no subject matter that was in itself important, or was subsequently relevant, and furthermore the extensive passages in the original of the exchange between the Count and the French ministers relating to Madagascar.]

One of the most obvious omissions in the *Gedenkschriften* was indeed the disappearance of the last one hundred or so pages of the English version. These sections had given British readers access to Benyowsky's exchange of correspondence with the French ministries concerning the settlement of the island, his 'Observations upon the Disorders of the Island of Madagascar', some further factual material referred to in the *Memoirs* and some supplementary paragraphs on religion, government, weather, the arts and culture in Madagascar. Some Dutch readers would have found this aspect of Benyowsky's account fascinating reading. The Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC) [United East India Company], which had flourished in the seventeenth century by eclipsing its French and British rivals in the Asia trade, had established important trading posts in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and at the Cape of Good Hope, Bengal, Malacca and Canton, as well as on the Malabar coast in India. While the VOC was undoubtedly on the decline by the second half of the eighteenth century, its legacy still lived on. The potentially sensitive information that Benyowsky's account revealed about French imperial desires regarding Madagascar would undoubtedly have been of interest to those still considering the possibilities of Dutch political and commercial expansion.

By removing this more factual material, which had also added a host of other narrative voices to the account, Loosjes trimmed the travelogue down to give it greater narrative coherence. These abridgements may also reflect Loosjes' awareness of weakening Dutch imperial ambitions and the shift in the status of Dutch towards the periphery of the polysystem, or indeed his own Mennonite agenda that opposed slavery. While Benyowsky's narrative does make some reference to his own dislike of slavery – as well as his assertions that the French had falsely warned the Madagascans 'that I was come to deprive them of their liberty, and that I had no other intention than to impose the yoke of slavery upon the whole island' (Benyowsky 1790: ii, 111-112) – his account carries little abolitionist weight and is more a self-promotional narrative of his own benevolent treatment of the native peoples he encountered than any clarion call for European powers to rethink their treatment of the inhabitants of the countries they colonised. As such, then, this was not a political narrative from which Loosjes could have drawn much useful, credible, material to feed any anti-slavery agenda and his abridgements did not greatly distort Benyowsky's narrative in this respect.

The removal of nautical detail introduced other quite far-reaching changes into the Dutch translation. Where in the *Memoirs*, Benyowsky had reported as they left the port of Bolsha on the Kamchatka Peninsula:

The day being hazy, and almost calm, anchored on the bank: depth of water from three fathoms and a quarter to three and a half; coarse greenish sand. At four o'clock a breeze springing up, set sail, and passed between the two banks. [...] Latitude sailed from, 52 degrees, 32 minutes; longitude sailed from, 359 degrees, 0 minutes; latitude in, 51 degrees, 34 minutes; longitude in, 358 degrees, 36 minutes from Bolsha; wind north-north-west; current from south to north; course south. (Benyowsky 1790: 302)

This section was missing completely from the *Gedenkschriften*, thus styling Benyowsky's account as less scientific and less factual, and the traveller himself as a less able navigator. It is interesting that such nautical detail should be removed and yet on the same page the list recording supplies and armaments be included. While in the English this list was typeset vertically, the Dutch translator chose to present it as a prose paragraph, noting:

Onze Krygs- en andere voorraad bestond uit 8 stukken Kanon, 2 Houwitzers, 2 Mortieren tot Bomben, 120 Snaphaanen met bajonetten, 80 Zabels, 60 Pistoolen, 1600 Ponden Buskruid, 200 Ponden Kogels, 800 Ponden gezouten Vleesch, 1200 Ponden gezouten, en 3000 Ponden gedroogden Visch, 1400 Ponden Traan, 200 Ponden Zuiker, 500 Ponden Thee, 4000 Ponden beschadigd Meel ... (Benyowsky 1791: ii, 128)

[Our military and other supplies comprised 8 pieces of cannon, 2 howitzers, 2 mortars for bombs, 120 muskets with bayonets, 80 sabres, 60 pistols, 1600 pounds of gunpowder, 200 pounds of shot, 800 pounds of salted meat, 1200 pounds of salted and 300 pounds of dried fish, 1400 pounds of whale oil, 200 pounds of sugar, 500 pounds of tea, 4000 pounds of damaged flour ...]

One can only surmise at why the nautical detail of the voyage itself was removed in favour of retaining such listings of provisions: perhaps the Dutch translator felt that the non-specialist reader could better envisage life at sea on the basis of how the boat was stocked. References to the weather, which would certainly have given Dutch readers a great sense of the hardships the crews had undergone, were also missing from the *Gedenkschriften*, so that brief comments such as 'Sunday, May the 22<sup>nd</sup>, in the bay of St. Maurice, at Beerings isle; weather squally, with rain; wind south-west' disappeared (Benyowsky 1790: i, 310). Comments on the well-being of the crew – 'According to the report, the whole company in good health.' (Benyowsky 1790: i, 315) – likewise disappeared from the Dutch version as Loosjes pressed on with the account, not wishing to bog the reader down in what he presumably considered to be detail irrelevant to the greater narrative.

On other occasions, Loosjes would make of the rather abbreviated diary style of the original a more flowing piece of prose. As the crew weighed anchor and set a course for Japan, Benyowsky noted (in Nicholson's translation):

Saturday, July 23. Fine hot weather, with a fresh breeze from east-north-east, and a long swell; the sea yellowish, and entirely changed in colour, which induced me to sound, but we found no bottom. At five, saw a double rainbow. (Benyowsky 1790: i, 383)

Op den eersten dag van onze hervatte reize hadden wy helder heet weêr, met eene frisse koelte uit het Noord Noord Oosten [sic]: de zee veranderde van kleur en wierd geelagtig, dit bewoog mij om te laten peilen, doch wij vonden geen grond: wij zagen ook een dubbelen Regenboog. (Benyowsky 1791: iii, 1)

[On the first day having resumed our journey, we had fine, hot weather, with a fresh breeze from the north-north-east: the sea changed colour and became yellowish, which encouraged me to sound the depths, but we did not find the bottom: we saw a double rainbow.]

Readability therefore seemed crucial to Loosjes as he made of the *Gedenkschriften* a piece that less obviously drew on the enumeration of fact or a quasi-scientific logbook style to convince readers of the authenticity of the account. In a sense, then, Loosjes was appealing more to the tradition of the sentimental traveller than the scientific – two modes of narrative differentiated, as Cronin has neatly put it, by the move away from the 'unadorned objectivity of the guide book' towards a more speculative response to phenomena (Cronin 2000: 40). While the maritime overtones of 'frisse koelte uit het Noord Noord Oosten' cannot be completely ignored, the initial presentation of the weather as simply 'helder' and 'heet' allows the sentence to be read more as the traveller's response to the pleasant climate than as a log book record. Detail, Cronin notes, 'still counts but the detail aims at recreating the experience of being a particular person in a particular place rather than acting as circumstantial evidence in the writer's case for being believed' (Cronin 2000: 40). Loosjes was therefore relocating the *Memoirs* to be read more as a work of entertainment and

adventure, thus downplaying its colonial ambitions. Perhaps he was also tacitly accepting that the Dutch provinces now played a peripheral rather than central role in European imperial expansion and that their interest in travel literature should be motivated less by its significance for their own trading connections than for the information it conveyed about other peoples, lands and cultures.

Loosjes was not the only translator to reflect on how the style of Benyowsky's account might have a bearing upon its plausibility. Indeed Georg Forster, one of the most prodigious translators of non-fictional travel writing in the eighteenth century, prefaced his German rendering, *Des Grafen Moritz August von Benyowsky ... Schicksale und Reisen: von ihm selbst beschrieben* (Leipzig, 1791), with a seminal essay on credit in travel writing, arguing that while not all the facts in this travelogue might be correct, the narrative as a whole appealed to 'eine innere Glaubwürdigkeit', an 'inner plausibility' (Forster, 1963: 29). While Forster was quick to note that Benyowsky's account was not a 'great' piece of travel literature, in that it lacked simplicity, purity and noble intent – a gesture towards its author's self-promotional stance – it had an inner coherence which should not be made to founder upon minor factual inaccuracies (Forster 1963: 31). Forster acknowledged that the less credible aspects of Benyowsky's account were forged in the fire of his imagination or derived from faulty memory, but these failings he put down to the same liveliness of spirit – 'dieselbe Lebhaftigkeit seines Geistes' – which gave his account the spontaneity that Forster otherwise equated with truth (Forster 1963: 34). In any case, Forster argued, any embroidering of the truth happened in those sections in which the traveller explained his individual exploits, rather than in those sections informing readers of the different societies and peoples with whom he had had contact (Forster 1963: 36). In reducing fictional travel writing to the simple narration of what was demonstrably 'true', Forster argued that critics failed to recognise the value of adventure in inspiring in readers a sense of wonder, and in encouraging in them intellectual curiosity for the new and the unusual (Forster 1963: 37) – all of which Benyowsky's account offered in abundance.

## 5. Conclusions

Petrus Loosjes' Dutch rendering of Benyowsky's *Memoirs* was therefore not a piece that in any way articulated any inferiority on the part of its translator towards the source text or indeed the need to handle the English version in a particularly deferential fashion. In this sense, then, he did not acknowledge the peripheral, 'minor' status of Dutch in relation to the cultural dominance of English, which might otherwise have compelled him to offer a more faithful translation of the original. Rather, Loosjes adopted a target-audience approach in which he considered what would make the *Gedenkschriften* most accessible by a general reading public in the Low Countries. In so doing, he restyled parts of the *Memoirs* to enhance the readability of the text in ways which reduced its appeal to scientific accuracy and made it more the tale of adventure for which Benyowsky is now best known. The issue of plausibility, argued so vociferously by Nicholson on Benyowsky's behalf, was circumvented by Loosjes as he put the additional supporting material at the back, where it was less obvious or dispensed with it altogether. Perhaps he considered that the *Memoirs* had been sufficiently well established as credible and authoritative in their English edition that further corroborations were not necessary in the Dutch. Certainly he must have felt that the factual detail with which the narrative was freighted was not its sole merit; indeed by removing the lengthy staccato enumerations of fact, he restyled the text to ensure that it made its claims to truth more through the spontaneity of adventure than through its adherence to scientific detail.

Where Loosjes most obviously repositioned the *Gedenkschriften* was in its consideration of the relationship between travel writing and imperial gain. Working towards the end of the age in which the Dutch had seen significant colonial expansion and at the start of a period in which Dutch travellers would enjoy rediscovering the benefits of domestic tourism, Loosjes may indeed have felt that the colonial preoccupations which shaped Benyowsky's journey and account were misplaced. Conquest, appropriation and slavery would also have sat ill with the Mennonite principles of Benyowsky's Dutch translator. Thus as the *Memoirs* shifted from occupying a central position in Anglophone travel writing to a more peripheral location in their Dutch guise as the *Gedenkschriften*, they were detached from their home context and placed within a rather different network of cultural relations. This required of Benyowsky's travelogue that it serve a new communicative purpose, namely to expand on existing knowledge of Russia, China and Japan, to enhance Dutch readers' awareness of cultural difference and, ultimately, to reflect more searchingly on their own place in the world.

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## Notes

[1]For a history of the Loosjes family, see W. M. C. Regt (1920) "Het geslacht Loosjes", *De Navorscher* LXIX: 312-33 and Maria Helena de Haan (1934) *Adriaan Loosjes*, Utrecht, W. de Haan.

[2]See De Haan (1934: 102-3) and Kloek and Mijnhardt (2004: 200) for more on domestic tourism and Loosje's own involvement in travel writing.

[3]For a more detailed list of Petrus Loosjes Adriaanzoon's translations (also of religious works), see Anon. 1813.

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