Compte rendu

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Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

Roger Ellis, ed. "Translation in the Middle Ages." *New Comparison. A Journal of Comparative and General Literary Studies*, 12, The University of Essex, United Kingdom, Autumn 1991.

This special issue of *New Comparison*, a journal published by the University of Essex (United Kingdom), is an offshoot of the second Cardiff Conference on the theory and practice of translation in the Middle Ages, held in 1989. In fact, this new collection of texts by Roger Ellis complements *The Medieval Translator*, I and II, reviewed by Paul Saint-Pierre in *TTR*, vol. V, no. 2.

The link between the nine texts might be the "total cultural context" of translations, as Roger ELLIS suggests in his introduction (p. 1). This very extensive concept encompasses many significant parameters, such as the part of the agents, from the commissionners to the intended audience, in the translation process. Incidentally, one might here express regret that communication between the French and the English fields of scholarship is so lacking. On the assumption that the cultural context of translation is a rather neglected field, the editor then refers to *Medieval Translators and their Craft* (J. Beer, ed., 1989) as a notable exception. No mention is made of *Traduction et Traducteurs au Moyen Âge* (G. Contamine, ed.) published the same year, which offers twenty-four papers on the profile of the medieval translator, spanning a wide geographic and historic area from Ireland to Russia, via Sicilia and Baghdad, from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. Yet the C.N.R.S. publication is a

valuable attempt indeed to survey the theory and practice of translation in the various medieval intellectual spheres: Christian — Occidental and Oriental —, Islamic and Judaic. Nevertheless, this comment is to be taken as a minor reservation, for the nine papers tackle crucial problems in the history and the theory of translation. They supplement the information collected to date and together sketch an acute portrait of the translator in the Middle Ages.

In a clever editing move, Ellis places at the beginning of the collection a paper which throws light on the contributions which follow. In *The Medieval Translator I*, Rita Copeland's "The Fortunes of 'Non verbum pro verbo' or Why Jerome is not a Ciceronian" had initiated the discussion by applying the concept of 'discursive systems' to the early history of Western translation. She then invited us to reread the *loci communes* — *fidus interpres, verbum pro verbo*, etc. — within those systems. In the second volume, Karen PRATT's study on "Medieval Attitudes to Translation and Adaptation" was given a similar introductory role. Jennifer R. GOODMAN's paper, dealing with attitudes toward translation in the later Middle Ages, similarly opens *Translation in the Middle Ages*. It focuses on the collaboration of the well-known fifteenth-century publisher, William Caxton, with one of his translators, Anthony Woodville. The conversational device used in the prologue and the epilogue of the translation, *Dictes and Sayengis of the Philosophers*, brings to light a range of different and somewhat antagonistic conceptions of the translator's duties. Another example of translation from Arabic to Latin to French to English, the text being studied deserves attention mostly for its insights into Caxton's role as revisor. According to Goodman, "Caxton provides here the earliest of many descriptions of his own practice as judge and editor of someone else's translations" (p. 16). When asking Caxton to revise his translation, Woodville actually seeks the publisher's authorization to take greater liberty, mostly in abridging the text and recentering the philosophical quotations. It certainly sounds as if the translator and the publisher used each other to take initiative with the authorized texts. However, Goodman detects, under the humor, the publisher's implicit criticism of the translator's courtly manner. While Woodville, like Chaucer and Malory, belongs to the creative translation and adaptation school and is therefore more sensitive to the target audience, Caxton's main concern seem to be the faithful transmission of the *Auctoritates*.

Noteworthily too, Goodman points out that Caxton and Woodville do not agree upon the target audience: only a courtly male audience or a wider one, including women and bourgeois, and hearers rather than readers. She stresses very pertinently the existence of a female reader in Caxton's mind. To sum up, this first paper raises the question of the diversified audience for translations in the late Middle Ages, and, as a result, the changing duties of the translators. These topics will appear to be central to the book.

Sandra McENTIRE addresses the problem of "weeping in translation", that is the way the Saxon monastic translators chose to translate the latin concept of *compunctio*. That word refers to the spiritual doctrine developed by Cassian, Benedict, Basil, Gregory the Great. It flourished in the cultural context of desert monasticism in the third and the fourth centuries. In the source culture, *compunctio cordis* connects with *gratia lacrimarum*, the latter being the external expression of the former. Among the various connotations of compunction are grace, fear, love, contemplation, longing for Heaven. Displaying a range of quotations from the Old English translation of, among others, the Rule of Benedict, Gregory's *Dialogi* and *Regula pastoris*, McEntire demonstrates that the etymologically accurate calque *onbryrdan/onbrydness* was used by the Anglo-Saxon translators in a specific way, restricted to the spiritual context. The Old English word consistently refers to the complete semantic area of *compunctio*. The knowledge of that lexical system was lost to nineteenth-century translators, such as Skeat and Thorpe, who underestimated the rich meaning of *onbryrdan* — penitence and joy all together — and stressed the lacrymose aspect, providing a less faithful translation, more suited to Victorian sensitivity. This example evidences the need for discourse analysis applied to medieval texts, in order to elucidate the connotative meanings of key terms.

Marianne E. KALINKE's contribution is an impressive survey of the number of problems a scholar in her particular field of research — the Old Norse-Icelandic translations of Old French literature — must face. The main one is indeed the paucity of reliable witnesses, the bulk of remaining manuscripts having been copied in the seventeenth century. Says the author: "Nowhere do we possess the equivalent of the translator's own work." (p. 50) So she warns the scholar against summary statements about the accuracy of the translations and the goals of the translators. The best we can do

at present is to take the best-preserved texts as "paradigmatic for the manner in which the translators worked in principle." (p. 48) Nevertheless the Norse-Icelandic translations could be a valuable tool to reconstruct the lacunary Old French texts. Kalinke's reservations on that particular field of research may be extended *mutatis mutandis* to the history of the medieval translation as a whole. Most of our pronouncements on the translator's work should be based on the pervasive examination of the manuscript tradition and its sociohistorical context.

Karen CHEREWATUK shows the structural differences between the French original of *Flore et Blanchefleur* and its translation into Middle English. The English poet's rendering is typified by abridgements in descriptions and by recasting of characters, devices which produce a fast-pace tale, and use of direct speech instead of the omniscient narrative. The translator's intervention results in a theatralization of the romance, making it more suited to the public performance than the French model. The expected audience of merchants could account for the emphasis put on the language of trade, buying and selling, presumably familiar to the hearers, and for the more explicitly sexual language and situations. Cherewatuk suggests that the French audience was intended to identify with the lovers, while the English one was led to be distanced from them by laughing. She describes the changes from the original as "self-conscious manipulations of the source" (p. 67), making it closer to the *fabliau* than the romance. That is another case of creative and very target-oriented translation in the later Middle Ages.

Ros ALLEN presents us with a comparative study of three translations of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*: Wace's (1125), Lazamon's (about 1220) and Mannying's (1338), the two latter Old English writers working from Wace's Anglo-Norman version. The three of them handle their source with deliberate freedom, owing to different conceptions of narrative and different classes of audience as well. Through a careful examination of the episode of Cassibellaunus, three ways of translating come to light. Wace's is the most feudal, infused by a strong sense of family solidarity. It stresses the free status of the Britons and extols values which must have been high in Norman society. More neutral is Lazamon, perhaps writing for a reader rather than for a hearer. His main concern seemingly is to convey an impression of remoteness.

Allen assumes that this translator has "a keen interest for the concept of past" (p. 73). In marked contrast to Wace's updating techniques, Lazamon's work is written in an "archaising idiolect probably modeled on the eleventh-century Old English sermons" (p. 71). As for Mannying, he uses the narratives both for didactic and entertainment purposes. Even if events are viewed in terms of moral doings, the target listener is supplied with vivid descriptions and summarization of former episodes.

Interestingly enough, both Cherewatuk's and Allen's contributions compel us to conclude that the medieval translator, coping with narrative genres, most often kept in mind the class of audience addressed. The classical rule of eloquence, to ensure a benevolent reader, must have ranked high among the translator's duties towards his reader. Faster pace, enhanced characters, direct and more effective speech are some of the devices used to that purpose.

Ruth EVANS considers the changes brought into translation by women through a male-dominated class of discourse: the sermon. She compares a set of early fourteenth-century orthodox Latin sermons with its translation in the early fifteenth century, when the Lollard movement made women's participation possible, a phenomenon which "may have shaped and refracted the translation of texts" (p. 89). As a historical reminder, Lollardy, like Catharism in thirteenth-century Southern France, seriously threatened the Roman church by assigning to women an active role in the cult. Although we lack clear information on the exact part of women in the translation process — compiler, translator or only addressee — several alterations can be found which may have been made deliberately "in order to accommodate the fact of women in the congregation" (p. 91). Evan notes an emphasis placed on family and marital status, in reaction to the dominant ideal of virginity, and a few instances of tempering of misogynist *exempla*. Despite the paucity of totally convincing examples, Evan's paper is very useful for the crucial question it raises: How can we re-inscribe women in texts from which they appear to be absent?

Catharine BATT observes the way Clemence of Barking uses the courtly lexis and rhetoric in her Anglo-Norman translation of the Vulgate version *Passio Sancte Katerine*. Once more, the translation is

a very target-oriented one. Clemence claims a new translation is necessary because of the audience's changing tastes. She aims at drawing her audience, mainly nuns of aristocratic origin, into devotion by "redirecting" the courtly idiom towards the Divine and paralleling the relation with God and the *courtois* engagement. Yet it is interesting to note that the *Vie de sainte Catherine d'Alexandrie* brings significant transformations into the courtly love register, such as putting together in divine love terms like *amur* and *confort* which are antithetical in courtly narratives. Batt argues that the choice of *rumanz* as a target language implied the deliberate choice of a literary register. The Anglo-Norman vernacular provided terms linked with the experience of recreation and love, an experience which could be redirected towards God. As noted by Batt, that was an optimistic view of human language, which was meant to reach the Divine even in its *courtois* expression.

The last two contributions focus on texts originating from fourteenth-century France, albeit from different cultural contexts. Inspired by Walter Benjamin's concept of "pure language," Nicholas WATSON's paper draws a parallel between the theory and practice of translation and the writing of mystical texts. In Watson's view, Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer des Simples Ames* (c. 1300), an allegorical fiction infused by apophatic mysticism, provides a background for a meditation on translation. The major theme in the *Mirouer* is the ineffability and hence the unknowability of God. The very best knowledge a mystical writer can gain is "the darkness of a true knowing ignorance of God" (p. 133). Like translating, mystical writing is misrepresentation, but necessary misrepresentation. Both aim to work beyond words. In her mystical book, Marguerite tries indeed to achieve a *translatio ad superna* (p. 133).

L.G. KELLY contributes a short commentary on Nicole Oresme's translations of Aristotle. He especially raises questions of "accuracy" and "closeness" in the Bishop of Lisieux's translations, noting that Oresme is more faithful to rhetoric than to grammar and lexis: his closeness applies to discourse rather than words. Kelly considers Oresme to be a Ciceronian and points out the significant influence of the French translation of the *Rhetorica* — *De Inventione* and *Ad Herennium* — by Jean d'Antioche (1282).

What conclusions may one draw at the end of this third collection by Roger Ellis, in regard to the former ones and to other such collections as well? Narrower in scope than most, it derives its strength mainly from a recurring issue: the intended audience. While previous collections have forcibly dealt with source-related topics, such as the Ciceronian and the Hieronymian heritage, the present essays bear witness to the acute consciousness of their audience in translators' minds. Some of them aim to achieve an accurate picture of the presumed or possible audience, in terms of gender, literacy and social class. Several papers convey the impression that the translator's major duty, in the later Middle Ages, was to please or to accommodate his/her audience. While bringing light to specific areas of the field, the present studies also draw attention to the lacunæ which continue to exist in our knowledge of the medieval translation practices, thus delineating areas where we might profitably intensify our investigations.

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