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Projet « Textes théoriques sur la traduction en Angleterre 1530-1941 »

John Dryden, The Preface to *Ovid's Epistles* (1680)

III. Notice

1. Dryden's preface to *Ovid's Epistles*, a founding text?

Ovid's Epistles can in many ways be said to mark a turning point in John Dryden's literary career. When the young publisher Jacob Tonson approached him to contribute to a miscellany edition of Ovid translations, Dryden was at the height of his reputation. Since his appointment as Poet Laureate in 1668 (for *Annus Mirabilis*, 1667) Dryden had dominated the literary scene as a critic (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 1668; *Essay of Heroic Plays*, 1672) and a playwright (*Marriage a la mode*, 1672; *All For Love*, 1678). However, the craze for heroic drama was starting to fade¹, and Dryden was to find in the practice of translation a new outlet for his poetical and critical activities, as well as the fulfilment of his lifelong engagement with classical texts². *Ovid's Epistles* marks at once the beginning of Dryden's late and prolific career as a translator of the classics, and that of his collaboration with Jacob Tonson – a relationship that would prove inseparable from Dryden's translating activities for the next twenty years.

Dryden's re-fashioning as a literary translator coincides with a renewal of classical translation in Augustan England. By the second half of the seventeenth century, English translations of most classical authors were widely available, some of them by renowned poets, or in lavish illustrated editions³. Through the examples set by Jonson, Sandys and May⁴, and later by Waller or Denham⁵, the practice of translation — or retranslation — of classical texts had been established as a way to appropriate the authority of classical authors, but also to offer oblique comments on current political, religious or aesthetic issues. However, by the end of the 1670s, these models came to be called into question, in the context of heated debate around the aesthetic value of earlier translations, the limits of the method of free translation advocated by Cowley and Denham, and the necessity to establish a specific English Neoclassical model in response to France's cultural dominance. A few months before Dryden wrote his preface, the Earl of Roscommon published a new translation of

¹ In 1679, Dryden's plays *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Spanish Friar* were poorly received, and his opera *The State of Innocence* based on Milton's *Paradise Lost* had appeared in print in 1677 without having been staged. See Gillespie and Wilson, "The Publishing and Readership of Translation", 40; and Hammond, *John Dryden, A Literary Life*, 142 sqq.

² On Dryden's earlier re-writings of the classics, see Hammond, *John Dryden and the Traces of Classical Rome*, part I: "Citation".

³ Such as John Ogilby's illustrated editions and translations of the classics, published and re-issued throughout the second half of the XVIIth century.

⁴ Jonson translated Horace's *Art of Poetry* in the early 1600s (publ. 1640); George Sandys published an illustrated and annotated translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in 1626, and Thomas May was renowned for his translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, or *Civil War* (1626-7).

⁵ Waller published in 1658 an amended and completed version of Sidney Godolphin's version of Virgil's *Aeneid* IV entitled *The Passion of Dido for Aeneas*. Denham translated books II and IV of Virgil's *Aeneid* (*The Destruction of Troy*, 1654; "The Passion of Dido", 1668).

Horace's *Art of Poetry*⁶ where he explicitly challenged the translation methods and the literary taste exemplified by Ben Jonson's earlier version of the poem⁷. Dryden's enthusiastic response to Roscommon in the preface to *Ovid's Epistles* also constitutes as a theoretical counterpart to Roscommon's *Art of Poetry*⁸.

The influence of Dryden's first essay on translation was immediate⁹. Although some of the statements made here were later qualified in response to Dryden's encounters with other classical authors, the themes and issues articulated in this text can be said to form the basis of Dryden's reflection on translation, and to establish the main tenets of Augustan translation discourse¹⁰. However, although the significance of the preface to *Ovid's Epistles* in English translation history remains undisputed¹¹, Dryden's long reputation as the "first English translation theorist"¹² has recently come into question. While George Steiner interprets Dryden's programmatic preface in terms of the "claims of theory" advanced by English XVIIth-century translators¹³, more recent critics have presented it as a collection of pragmatic, *ad-hoc* notes on the practice of literary translation¹⁴. Similarly, historians of translation have challenged the novelty of Dryden's three-fold approach to translation, and his distinction between "metaphrase", "paraphrase" and "imitation" has been traced to sources as distant and varied as Philo Judaeus, Quintilian, Lawrence Humphrey, Roger Ascham and Pierre-Daniel Huet¹⁵.

In response to such debates, it seems wise to follow Anthony Pym's suggestion that, in order to establish the historical importance of a translation — and by extension, of a translation preface —, one should examine the conditions of production of the text, as well as the social, critical and literary networks in which the translator was involved at the time. The following pages will discuss Dryden's contribution to the contemporary debates on translation and literary criticism, but also the relationship between his work and seventeenth-century literary markets and reading practices, in an attempt at once to define the place of Dryden's preface in the Augustan culture of translation and to re-evaluate its significance to English translation history.

2. Ovid "by various hands": the format and readership of *Ovid's Epistles*.

⁶ Horace's *Art of Poetry* made English by the Earl of Roscommon (1680). For a detailed account of Roscommon's criticism of Jonson, see the notes to the text below.

⁷ First published in 1640 and frequently re-issued in miscellany collections of Horace's poetry.

⁸ A reverse process is to be observed in the preface to *Sylvae* (1685), where Dryden claims in turn that he sought to put into practice Roscommon's principles in his 1684 *Essay of Translated Verse*.

⁹ On the reception of *Ovid's Epistles*, see "Reception" below.

¹⁰ Hopkins, "Dryden and his contemporaries", 55.

¹¹ Passages of the preface are included in all translation studies historical readers: see Lefevere, *Translation/History/ Culture*, 24; Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 38-41; Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, 171-174 ;Weissbort and Eynsteinsson, *Translation, Theory and Practice*, 144-148.

¹² Robinson, *Western Translation*, 172

¹³ G. Steiner, *After Babel*, 267-270; see also Ballard, *De Cicéron à Benjamin*, 205-6.

¹⁴ T.R Steiner, *English Translation Theory*, 29-30; Hopkins, "John Dryden", 144 and "Dryden and his Contemporaries", 55; Wiseman, "Perfectly Ovidian", 421.

¹⁵ Robinson, *Encyclopedia*, 153 and 167, and *Western Translation*, 172. See also G. Steiner, *After Babel*, 267.

The format of *Ovid's Epistles* deserves specific attention. Indeed, although Tonson's first collection of translations was not without precedent — Alexander Brome had published in 1666 a selection of *Horace's Poems* that went through at least three editions by 1680 —, the publication of *Ovid's Epistles* was to link the names of Dryden and of Tonson with the genre of the classical miscellany¹⁶. Based on partial translations of classical authors by several hands, the format was a response to a "newly commercialized literary world", where the Classics represented a "mine of raw material with ready-made and marketable prestige"¹⁷. Miscellanies also provided occasional poets¹⁸ and new translators¹⁹ with an opportunity to advertise their talents. In the case of *Ovid's Epistles*, the genre of the heroic epistle proved an especially favourable ground for poets previously associated with the theatre²⁰, such as Dryden of course, who contributed three of the twenty-three translations ("Canace to Macareus", "Helen to Paris", "Dido to Aeneas"), but also Thomas Otway ("Phaedra to Hyppolitus"), Abraham Wright ("Hypermnestra to Linus"), Thomas Rymer ("Penelope to Ulysses"), Nahum Tate ("Leander to Hero", "Hero to Leander", "Medea to Jason") and Aphra Behn ("Oenone to Paris").

An important element of the "variety" advertised by Dryden in his preface consists in the publication of alternative versions of the same poem. The epistle of "Phillis to Demophon" appears twice in the miscellany, and Dryden's version of "Dido to Aeneas", written with the collaboration of the Earl of Mulgrave, is immediately followed, in the 1680 edition, by a second translation "by another hand"²¹. The principle of multiple translations of a text is a distinctive feature of the genre, in keeping with reading practices established as early as the 1650s, according to which readers of taste were expected to compare and choose between several versions of a text²².

Miscellanies also played a key role in the unprecedented broadening of the readership for classical translations that marked seventeenth-century England. At a time when classical knowledge — or at least the possession of well-bound, elegant editions of the Classics²³ — was considered as a mark of intellectual gentility,

¹⁶ On Tonson as promoter of translation, see Gillespie and Wilson, "The Publishing and Readership of Translation", 40. According to them, *Ovid's Epistles* was the book that launched Tonson's career. Tonson would continue to publish « Dryden's miscellanies » even after the poet's death. See also Andreadis, "The early modern afterlife of Ovidian erotics: Dryden's *Heroides*", 403-405.

¹⁷ Gillespie and Wilson, "The Publishing and Readership of Translation", 39.

¹⁸ Such as Sir Carr Scrope ("Sappho to Phaeon"), Edmund Poley ("Phillis to Demophon"), Richard Duke ("Paris to Helen", "Acontius to Cydippe"), Thomas Flatman ("Laodamia to Protesilaus") or the Earl of Mulgrave ("Helen to Paris").

¹⁹ John Floyd ("Phillis to Demophon") was to publish in 1681 a translation of Du Bartas' *La Semaine*, and in 1682 a "paraphrase" of the *Song of Songs* in the manner of Cowley's *Pindarique Odes*.

²⁰ Gillespie and Wilson, "The Publishing and Readership of Translation", 40; Hooker and Swedenberg, "Contributions to *Ovid's Epistles*", 325-6.

²¹ Attributed to the lawyer and politician John Somers, who would also translate the Life of Alcibiades in Tonson's *Plutarch's Lives translated by several hands* (1683-6).

²² See for example Waller's preface to *The Passion of Dido* (1658), or Brome's preface to *The Poems of Horace* (1666). On the practice of comparing various versions of the same text, see Sloman, *The Poetics of Translation*, 10.

²³ K. Van Eerde links the success of Ogilby's elegant editions and translations in the second half of the XVIIth century to the development of private libraries in the nobility and gentry of England. *Ogilby and the Tastes of his Times*, 57.

miscellanies offered the reader who could not read Latin an easy, ready-made access to ancient culture and literature. Women were a target readership, as underlined by Dryden's remark that Ovid's elegies could be "read (...) by matrons without a blush"²⁴. Finally, not only were miscellany translations instrumental in opening up ancient literature to the rising middle-class, but they also offered portable collections of key classical texts. First published in crown octavo in 1680, *Ovid's Epistles* was re-issued by Tonson in smaller, cheaper, and more practical foolscap octavo editions in 1681, 1683 and 1688. Elegant editions were produced in parallel, such as the 1693 fifth edition, a small demy octavo "adorn'd with several cuts"²⁵. In this variety of formats, Tonson's miscellanies were sure to respond to the enthusiasm for classical translations growing at once in the social and political elite and in less educated circles²⁶.

3. Translation as literary criticism.

At first sight, Dryden's preface to *Ovid's Epistles* follows the format established by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century classical translations. After providing biographical information on Ovid, Dryden proceeds to examine his poetry, and ends with an apology of his own translation principles. Yet Dryden adapts the conventional template so that his remarks on the "most appropriate way of Version" are inseparable from his discussion, not only of Ovid's poetic manner, but also of contemporary literary models.

Dryden had published several formal treatises in the 1670s, yet he seemed to view prefaces as privileged ground for the discussion of literary and aesthetic issues, and he carried this practice into his translations. A comparison with the preface to *The State of Innocence* (1677)²⁷, for example, will show many similarities, not only in Dryden's half-didactic, half-conversational tone, but also in his use of literary precedents and in his constant appeal to the readers' "better judgment" and taste²⁸.

Many parallels are also to be found between the first pages of the preface dedicated to Ovid, and Dryden's critique of the translation modes attributed to Jonson, Cowley and Denham. The issue of translation is first evoked *à propos* Ovid's florid style, which "gives occasion to his Translators, who dare not Cover him, to blush at the nakedness of their Father"²⁹. Dryden's aesthetic criteria are equally applied to Ovid's poetry and seventeenth-century translations and "imitations". While one finds in Ovid "a certain gracefulness of youth", Jonson's translation style is to be avoided because "gracefulness will often be wanting". Ovid's mimetic qualities ("his thoughts (...) are but the Pictures and Results of his Passions"; "some beautiful Design") are praised in the same terms as the successful translator's "portrait" of his

²⁴ See text below. On the links between Ovid's *Heroides* and the female readership, see Wiseman, "Perfectly Ovidian", 426 sqq.

²⁵ Perhaps planned as a companion piece to the illustrated *Virgil* that would be published in 1697.

²⁶ On the wide readership of Dryden's Ovid and other classical translations, see Hopkins, "Classical translation and imitation", 79.

²⁷ Significantly entitled "An Apology for Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence".

²⁸ On the links between Dryden's literary criticism and his translations, see Smallwood, "Dryden's Criticism as Transfusion", 83, and Wiseman, "Perfectly Ovidian", 419 sqq.

²⁹ "The Preface to *Ovid's Epistles*"(n.p.)

author³⁰. Even Ovid's "faults", such as his excessive wit or his fashioning of Greek heroines according to Roman fashion³¹ find an echo in Dryden's criticism of the "English wits" Cowley and Denham, and of their modernising, adaptive "imitations". Similarly, Dryden's portrayal of Ovid's style as "courtly" and "cavalier"³² in the first half of the preface announces the discussion of the translation methods of Cavalier poets Cowley, Denham, and Waller. Carefully staged as a debate on translation, Dryden's preface also reads as a discussion of contemporary literary modes and tastes.

Apart from the famous distinction between metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation, which is specifically discussed below, what has attracted most critical attention in *Ovid's Epistles* is Dryden's stress on preserving the "character" of the author. While Judith Sloman interprets this concern as an effect of Dryden's Neoplatonic approach to translation, according to which aesthetic ideas can equally be "expressed" in different languages³³, T.R Steiner, perhaps more accurately, reads it as a mark of the "empirical idealism" that, he argues, characterises neoclassical translation. According to T.R. Steiner, Dryden is an heir to Aristotle's conception of "mimesis", according to which the models for artistic representation – or here, poetic translation – are identified through a process of analytical abstraction, in which the specific, analysable qualities of the source are isolated and defined³⁴. One may easily recognize in such a process the very principles of the Aristotelian school of literary criticism which emerged in France in the second half of the seventeenth century, and whose influence reached its apex in England in the 1670s. Thomas Rymer, also a contributor to *Ovid's Epistles*, had famously translated René Rapin's *Réflexions sur la Poétique d'Aristote* in 1674, and in 1677, Dryden himself had hailed Nicolas Boileau and René Rapin as "the greatest of (...) his Age"³⁵.

If Dryden's prescriptive, normative comments on translation may perhaps fall short of "theory", one can certainly recognise in them the habits of thought of Dryden the critic. In its concern to define the "character" of Ovid's heroic elegies as a specific literary genre, and to shape the taste of his readers accordingly, the preface to *Ovid's Epistles* sets a precedent for Dryden's greater translation projects: his 1693 translation of the *Satires* of Juvenal and Persius, prefaced by a "Discourse upon the Origin and Progress of Satire", and the 1697 *Aeneis*, whose dedication intermingles Dryden's comments on the proper way to translate Virgil with discussions of the most influential English and French Virgilian critics.

4. Metaphrase, paraphrase, imitation.

As has been noted by many translation historians, Dryden's use of the terms "metaphrase", "paraphrase" and "imitation" follows a long tradition in translation

³⁰ On Dryden's pictorial metaphors, see below, "Translation as 'transfusion'"

³¹ "...perhaps he has Romaniz'd his Grecian Dames too much, and made them speak sometimes as if they had been born in the City of Rome, and under the Empire of Augustus."

³² "All his Poems bear the Character of a Court, and appear to be written as the *French* call it *Cavalierement*..."

³³ Sloman, *The Poetics of Translation*, 16. See also below on Dryden's use of the clothing metaphor.

³⁴ T. R. Steiner, *English Translation Theory*, 39.

³⁵ Dryden, *The State of Innocence*, sig. [b2]^v.

theory. In his *Institutio Oratoria*, Quintilian distinguishes between the pedagogical exercise of "metaphrase", where literary models are re-written one word at a time, and that of "paraphrase", where original texts are reworked on a line-by-line basis³⁶. In the English tradition, the rhetorical distinction established by Quintilian was used by Lawrence Humphrey, whose 1559 treatise *Interpretatio Linguarum* advises translators to follow a "middle way" between the extremes of a "rough" word-for-word translation and of a "loose" and "licentious" rendering of the text³⁷. In 1570, Quintilian's definitions also provided the basis for Roger Ascham's discussions of "paraphrase" and "metaphrase" as specific pedagogical practices³⁸. However, while Ascham and Humphrey were mainly concerned with ways of re-writing the classics from one ancient language into the other, Dryden's appropriation of these traditional terms rather echoes Pierre-Daniel Huet influential *De Interpretatione* (1666). Like Huet, Dryden uses Quintilian's distinction between word-for-word rendition and looser forms of translation as well as the commonplace reference to Horace's *Art of Poetry* as a way to relate his own practice of free translation to the classical discourse on literary emulation³⁹.

However rooted in classical precedents Dryden's famous distinction may be, it would be a mistake to separate Dryden's discourse on translation from the literary culture of the times. The context of production of *Ovid's Epistles* and its format suggest that one should read Dryden's tripartite definition of translation, not as an absolute taxonomy — Dryden himself explicitly indicates that he has not respected his own terms — but rather as an invitation to compare between different manners of translation, according to the very genre of the miscellany.

Besides, Dryden's discussion of the "most appropriate" way of translation is best understood in the context of the Augustan debate on "paraphrase" and "imitation". By explicitly referring to Cowley and Denham, and by paraphrasing their agenda to make (the poet) "speak, not onely as a man of this Nation, but as a man of this age"⁴⁰, Dryden takes position on the controversy raised by the recent publishing of radically modernised versions of the classics. As noted above, Denham's method of free translation was widely accepted when Dryden wrote his preface. Yet in 1676, Rochester's "Allusion to Horace" gave a whole new meaning to Denham's commonplace statement by offering a free re-writing of Horace *Satires* that transferred their time and place to Restoration London⁴¹. Rochester's example was to be followed by John Oldham, whose "imitations" of Horace, composed on the same mode, were circulating in manuscript before being published in 1681⁴². Now, the

³⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X.v.1-11.

³⁷ See Norton, *The Ideology and Language of Translation in Renaissance France and their Humanist Antecedents*, 13 sqq.; and Renier, *Interpretatio. Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler*, 283.

³⁸ While "metaphrasis" is defined as the transposition of a text into another literary genre, Ascham underlines the eristic dimension of Quintilian's approach to imitative translation, and defines "paraphrasis" as : "not onlie to expresse at large with moe wordes, but to strive and contend (...) the best latin authores, into other latin wordes". Ascham, *The Schoolemaster*, 34 sqq.

³⁹ On Huet, see Norton, *The Ideology and Language of Translation*, 58-59.

⁴⁰ Denham, *The Destruction of Troy*, sig. [A3]^v.

⁴¹ For a detailed analysis of Rochester's "allusion", see Weinbrot, "The 'Allusion to Horace': Rochester's Imitative Mode" and *Eighteenth Century Satire*, 69 sqq.

⁴² Weinbrot actually underlines the structural link that ties the Restoration fashion for travesties with the contemporary practice of free translation. *The Formal Strain*, passim.

practice of adaptive re-writing designated by the names of "allusion", "imitation", and sometimes "paraphrase" was widely applied to contemporary literature, in particular to French poetry – Dryden was to compose a similar "Englashing" of Boileau's *Art Poétique* in 1683. What proved less acceptable to some Restoration readers was that such liberties were taken with classical authors.

Underlying Dryden's description of "imitation" as an abusive form of re-writing⁴³ was also the fact that the protean genre of the "imitation" encompassed the rude and subversive travesties of the classics that multiplied in Restoration England after Charles Cotton's 1664 *Virgile Travestie*. As Howard Weinbrot has noted, these highly popular and irreverent versions almost inevitably transposed the action of the poems they parodied into contemporary England⁴⁴. By offering a clear, although flexible distinction between translation "with latitude" and more "libertine" versions of the classics, Dryden obviously seeks to distinguish the "paraphrases" and "imitations" offered in *Ovid's Epistles* from such disreputable forms of re-writing⁴⁵. Here again, Dryden's attempt to chart an ill-defined territory, to re-appropriate controversial practices, and to contain subversive interpretations of the classics foreshadows the more extensive discussions of the contemporary fashion for classical parody and burlesque which he would develop in his preface to the translation of Juvenal's *Satires* and in the dedication of his *Aeneis*.

Finally, it has often been pointed out that searching for a middle ground is a characteristic feature of Dryden's criticism⁴⁶; so is his tendency to establish literary genealogies. In rejecting Ben Jonson's authority, and in at once acknowledging and taking distances from the influence of Cowley and Denham, Dryden sets the main landmarks for his construction of the "progress" of poetry – and translation – in seventeenth century England, as it would appear in his 1683 adaptation of Boileau's *Art Poétique*, before being fully displayed in his 1697 dedication of the *Aeneis*.

5. Metaphors ancient and modern: Dryden's imagery of translation.

From the unavoidable quotation of Horace on "fidus interpres" to the commonplace metaphors of clothing or "Englashing", the preface to *Ovid's Epistles* may be read as a compendium of seventeenth century translation discourse. As is common in contemporary texts on translation, Dryden's preface conflates *topoi* from both Ancient and modern sources. While the imagery of clothing or racing and the reference to the pictorial arts are inherited from Cicero, Quintilian and Seneca, other themes such as the alchemical metaphor borrowed from Denham, the parallel with musical improvisation and the reference to topiary belong to the modern imagination. However, what makes Dryden's use of the received imagery of translation remarkable is the way familiar terms are assimilated and redefined, through a playful

⁴³ In Dryden's words in the preface to *Ovid's Epistles*, "the greatest wrong which can be done to the Name and reputation of the Dead".

⁴⁴ *Ovid's Epistles* had already undergone several travesties and burlesques by 1680. See Wiseman, "Perfectly Ovidian", 436 sqq; and Andreadis, "The early modern afterlife of Ovidian erotics", 411 sqq.

⁴⁵ The association of loose forms of translation with "libertine" literature and behaviour was encouraged by Rochester's reputation as a libertine, but also by the scurrilous nature of the travesties and other burlesque "paraphrases" of Ovid.

⁴⁶ Hooker and Swedenberg, *The Works of John Dryden*, 335-336.

interweaving of direct and indirect quotations in which Dryden's modern predecessors are often set against their own Ancient sources.

The dominating theme – although perhaps the most commonplace – is that of freedom. Building upon Denham's "noble way" to render the classics – as opposed to the "slavery" of literal renditions – Dryden re-activates the metaphor by systematically associating word-for-word translation with physical impediments: confinement, chains, fettered legs, etc. Somewhat surprisingly, Dryden's *via media*, or "translation with latitude", also refers to the imagery of bondage ("he may stretch his Chain to such a latitude"), which seems to coincide with that of faithfulness – although for Dryden, Horace's "fidus interpres" translates "too faithfully". At the other end of the spectrum, Dryden also exploits the latent moral implications of Cowley's "libertine" way of translation when identifying it as a form of self-gratification at the expense of the author⁴⁷.

Dryden's dialogic use of the imagery of translation is most apparent in his discussion of Cowley. In his Preface to *Pindarique Odes*, Cowley had borrowed the racing metaphor inherited from Seneca and Quintilian, according to which the imitator should seek to overrun his model if he wishes at least to reach him⁴⁸. Dryden also resorts to this parallel, implying that, while refusing to embrace "Mr. Cowley's way of imitation", he nonetheless envisages translation as a competitive literary practice. More challenging is Dryden's re-working of Cowley's pecuniary metaphor. Drawing on Cicero's comparison of translation to the payment of goods in *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*⁴⁹, Cowley had claimed that his additions would compensate the losses incurred in translation and "make [his author] a Richer man then he was in his own Countrey"⁵⁰. Dryden's objection ("and 'tis not always that a man will be contented to have a Present made him, when he expects the payment of a Debt") both denies that Cowley's imitation could serve as "payment" and shifts the focus back on the translator's duty towards his readers, which was the actual object of Cicero's metaphor⁵¹.

Another shift of traditional imagery occurs in Dryden's answer to Denham's Preface to the *Destruction of Troy*. In comparing the translation of Virgil to the alchemical "pouring out" and "transfusion" of the "Spirit" of poetry⁵², Denham's pun had given a materialistic turn to the theme of translation "according to the spirit". By re-defining the "transfusion" as a purely stylistic issue ("no farther force than to Expression"), Dryden apparently restores the traditional distinction between words and sense – a distinction immediately illustrated by the usual analogy with clothing. However, although this passage has sometimes been interpreted in terms of a Neo-classical approach to translation supposedly defined as transparent communication⁵³, it should be noted that the distinction between words and ideas almost immediately

⁴⁷ a remark reminiscent of Lawrence Humphrey's identification of "loose" translation with self-indulging "licence" (*Interpretatio Linguarum*, 1549).

⁴⁸ Seneca, *Epistolae Morales*, LXXIX.16 and Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X.ii.9-10.

⁴⁹ Cicero, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, I, V, 14.

⁵⁰ Cowley, preface to the *Pindarique Odes* (in *Poems*, 1656, sig. Aaa 2^r).

⁵¹ Cicero writes : " I did not think I ought to count [the words] out to the reader like coins, but to pay them by weight, as it were" (transl. H.M. Hubbel, in Robinson, *Western Translation Theory*, 9).

⁵² Denham, *The Destruction of Troy*, sig. [A3]^r.

⁵³ See for example Venuti, *The Translation Studies Reader*, 18.

blurs into the notion of "character", which encompasses both the author's "turns of Thought, and of Expression".

Most significant then is Dryden's turn to the analogy with painting, again inherited from classical sources, and again used by Cowley in the preface to his *Pindarique Odes*. While Cowley, after Quintilian and d'Ablancourt, focused on distinguishing between soulless copies and lively imitations⁵⁴, Dryden transposes the object of the painter's "mimesis" away from the reproduction of an existing painting to that of a live person. Once more, Dryden's reshaping of the parallel enables him to meet the promoters of "elegant" translations on their very own grounds⁵⁵. More importantly, it foreshadows Dryden's more developed discussions of the art of translation as a specifically aesthetic enterprise in *Sylvae* (1685), the *Satires of Juvenal* (1693), and the dedication of the *Aeneis* (1697). Finally, although Dryden's comparison between translation and portrait painting was certainly not new at the time, it was nonetheless influential: as T.R. Steiner has noted, the parallel would become after Dryden one of the most common images in Neoclassical translation discourse⁵⁶.

6. "Transgressing the rules": from theory to practice.

Dryden's sources for his contributions to *Ovid's Epistles* are well established. According to Paul Hammond, Dryden used the Latin annotated editions of Ovid's poetry by Daniel Heinsius (1629) and Rorchard Cnipping (1670)⁵⁷. As was common at the time, he also made use of previous translations, such as the French annotated version of Ovid's elegies by Michel de Marolles (1661)⁵⁸, and the English translations by Tuberville (1567), Saltonstall (1636), Heywood (1637) and Sherburne (1639)⁵⁹. Dryden is surprisingly silent about his precedents⁶⁰, from whom he liberally borrows expressions, rhymes and, occasionally, whole lines. His only acknowledged debt is to the Earl of Mulgrave, to whom he would later attribute almost the whole of the elegy "Helen to Paris".⁶¹

As Dryden openly admits in the preface, his approach to translation is freer than his own definition of "paraphrase" would admit. Although his three contributions to the miscellany are almost equal in length to their originals, they omit or expand

⁵⁴ See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, X.ii.6-7, d'Ablancourt's preface to his *Lucian* (1654) and Cowley's preface to the *Pindarique Odes*: "the like happens too in pictures, from the same root of exact imitation; which being a vile and unworthy kind of servitude, is incapable of producing anything good or noble" (*Poems*, 1656, sig. Aaa 2^r).

⁵⁵ In the preface to his 1654 *Lucian*, one of d'Ablancourt's key arguments for his famous "belles infidèles" is indeed "élégance".

⁵⁶ T.R. Steiner, *English Translation Theory*, 35 sqq.

⁵⁷ Hammond, *The Poems of John Dryden*, 376.

⁵⁸ Michel de Marolles, *Recueil de diverses pièces d'Ovide et autres poemes anciens*, Paris, 1666. Dryden's use of French editions and translations is extensively discussed in the dedication to his *Aeneis* (1697).

⁵⁹ See Hopkins, *Notes and Queries* 222 (1977) 218-219; Hooker and Swedenberg, *The Works of John Dryden*, 337-343; Hammond, *The Poems of John Dryden*, 393-412.

⁶⁰ Compare with Denham's, Waller's, or Brome's discussions of their precedents, which they claim to "highly improve" (Brome), or again with Dryden's own remarks in *Sylvae* (1685).

⁶¹ It would be omitted in Tonson's 1701 edition of Dryden's poems. Hammond, *The Poems of John Dryden*, 397.

many Ovidian lines⁶². Dryden's variations from the source text are partly explained by the fact that the seventeenth century translator was expected to interpret the text as much as to offer a literary equivalent to it. Dryden's comment in the preface that some Ovid's "conceits" need clarification is matched by explanatory translations. In "Dido and Aeneas", for example, Dryden elucidates Ovid's allusion to Virgil's *Aeneid* II: "si quaeras ubi sit formosi mater Iuli — / occisit a duro sola relictā viro (Do you ask where the mother of pretty Iulus is? — she perished, left behind by her unfeeling lord)"⁶³ by providing both the name of "pretty Iulus' mother" and the manner of her death: "Left to pursuing foes Creūsa stayed, / By thee, base man, forsaken and betrayed"⁶⁴.

Besides, although Dryden is careful to distance himself from Cowley's and Denham's methods of "imitation", his mode of free translation follows the practices established in the 1650s and 1660s by Edmund Waller and Denham himself. Some additions are designed as political allusions, such as the couplet in "Dido to Aeneas" referring — quite transparently — to the 1678-1681 Exclusion Crisis: "What People is so void of common sence, / To Vote Succession from a Native Prince"⁶⁵. As Ovidian elegiac distichs are turned into heroic couplets — a meter whose codification was partly achieved through Denham's and Waller's translations of Virgil —, Dryden re-arranges the Ovidian imagery and syntax in order to ensure a closed couplet, or to create the prescribed "turn"⁶⁶. Finally, Dryden's alterations of the source seem motivated by a desire to increase the dramatic quality of Ovid's elegies. Where, in an allusion to Dido's ambiguous union with Aeneas in Virgil's *Aeneid* IV, Ovid's heroine declares: "audieram vocem; nymphas ululasse putavi / Eumenides fati signa dedere meis (I had heard a voice; I thought it a cry of the nymphs — 'twas the Eumenides sounding the signal for my doom)"⁶⁷, Dryden's Dido exclaims:

A dreadful howling eccho'd round the place,
The Mountain Nymphs, thought I, my Nuptials grace.
I thought so then, but now too late I know
The Furies yell'd my Funerals from below.⁶⁸

The transformation of Ovid's elegiac epistles into tragic soliloquies may of course be linked to Dryden's own practices as a playwright; yet, in this specific case, it also follows Waller and Denham's tragic representations of the Queen of Carthage in their own translations of the Dido episode⁶⁹.

⁶² The editions of Dryden's *Epistles* by Hammond and by Hooker and Swedenberg both provide detailed indications on Dryden's additions and omissions.

⁶³ Ovid, *Heroides* VII, ll. 83-84 and Loeb translation.

⁶⁴ Dryden, *Ovid's Epistles*, 220.

⁶⁵ Dryden, *Ovid's Epistles*, 216.

⁶⁶ See Ovid in "Dido to Aeneas": "alter habendus amor tibi restat et altera Dido / quamque iterum fallas, altera danda fides (A second love remains for you to win, and a second Dido; a second pledge to give, and a second time to prove false)"; and Dryden's version: "Yet there new Sceptres and new Loves you seek / New Vows to plight, and plighted Vows to break". Ovid, *Heroides* VII, ll. 17-18 (Loeb translation), and Dryden, *Ovid's Epistles*, 216.

⁶⁷ Ovid, *Heroides* VII, ll. 95-96 and Loeb translation.

⁶⁸ Dryden, *Ovid's Epistles*, 221.

⁶⁹ Waller's *The Passion of Dido for Aeneas* (1658), which Dryden commends here as an example of "paraphrase", was reissued in 1679. Denham's translation also entitled "The Passion of Dido for Aeneas" was first published in the 1668 edition of Denham's *Poems and Translations*, a collection re-edited in 1671.

Actually, as Hooker and Swedenberg have remarked, Dryden's rendering of Ovid's epistles falls surprisingly short of the "heroic" mode as defined and practiced in *All for Love* or *The State of Innocence*⁷⁰. Although Dryden retains and develops the vocal dimension of Ovid's *Heroides*⁷¹, he also tends to smooth out their characteristic discrepancies of tone and voice in favour of a more polished style⁷². Some explain this divergence by considering Dryden's pieces as early exercises in translation, composed at a time when Dryden was strongly influenced by Waller and other court poets⁷³. A more satisfying hypothesis is that Dryden's translation matches Ovid's reputation in seventeenth-century Europe as a "sweet", "smooth" poet – a characterization present for example in Michel de Marolles' discussion of his French translation of the *Heroides*, and echoed, as noted above, by Dryden himself⁷⁴.

Dryden's interpretation of Ovid's "courtly" mode is, however, highly complex. As has often been noted⁷⁵, Dryden's complaints that Ovid's wit is "too pointed", and that his "conceits" pose unequalled difficulties to the translator are undermined by Dryden's own resort to puns and witticisms, some of which are actually not prompted by the letter of the text. Equally ambiguous is Dryden's response to Ovid's reputation as a morally loose, "lascivious" poet⁷⁶. His assurance in the preface that the translations are appropriate for the ladies, and that offending passages have been omitted from his version reflect current anxieties about the danger of making these pathetic representations of unchaste heroines available to the female readership⁷⁷. Some of Dryden's omissions do appear to follow a concern for "bienséance". In "Canace to Macareus", for example, the line evoking the death of Canace's incestuous baby, "torn limb from limb" by beasts⁷⁸, is left out. Yet, far from making the English version more suitable for women, Dryden more often than not expands on the erotic details already in the original. In "Canace to Macareus" again, the heroine's evocation of her illicit embraces with her brother is developed in four additional — and highly suggestive — lines:

⁷⁰ Hooker and Swedenberg, *The Works of John Dryden*, 327-329. See also the preface to *Examen Poeticum* (1693), where Dryden declares to have "attempted to restore Ovid to his Native sweetness, easiness and smoothness".

⁷¹ As William Frost notes about Dryden's translations of Ovid: "the same couplet which had been perfected for the aural-oral uses of the theater by Dryden and others (...) is now providing a living for the (poet) by translations written for the page". *John Dryden. Dramatist, Satirist, Author*, 155.

⁷² For an analysis of Dryden's metrical "smoothing" strategies, see Hooker and Swedenberg, *The Works of John Dryden*, 327-329.

⁷³ See Hooker and Swedenberg, *The Works of John Dryden*, 323 and 329.

⁷⁴ Dryden was to reiterate his understanding of Ovid's "character" in the preface to the 1693 miscellany *Examen Poeticum*: "I have (...) attempted to restore Ovide to his Native sweetness, easiness, and smoothness..." ('The Dedication', sig. B3^r). On the reception of Ovid's *Heroides* in Augustan England, see for example Rachel Trickett, "The *Heroides* and the English Augustans", *passim*.

⁷⁵ See Tissol, "Dryden's Additions and the Interpretive Reception of Ovid", and Hopkins, "Dryden and Ovid's 'Wit Out of Season'", *passim*.

⁷⁶ An adjective at once referring to Ovid's extravagant style and erotic content. See Hopkins, "Dryden and Ovid's 'Wit Out of Season'", 168; and Wiseman, "Perfectly Ovidian", 419.

⁷⁷ Wiseman, "Perfectly Ovidian", 426-427.

⁷⁸ "nate, dolor matris, rapidarum praeda ferarum, / ei mihi! natali dilacerate tuo (O my son, grief of thy mother, prey of the ravening beasts, ah me! torn limb from limb on thy day of birth)". *Heroides*, XI, ll. 107-108, Loeb translation.

When half denying, more than half content,
Embraces warmed me to a full consent:
Then with Tumultuous Joys my Heart did beat,
And guilt that made them anxious, made them great.⁷⁹

7. Reception.

Although Tonson's second edition of *Ovid's Epistles* was published as early as 1681, and was followed by many re-issues (1683, 1688, 1693, 1701, 1705, 1712)⁸⁰, the success of Dryden's preface and translations may perhaps best be measured by the flourish of parodies that followed their first publication. In the very same year 1680, Tonson published a new version of Alexander Radcliffe's *Ovid Travestie* (1673), which was re-issued in 1681⁸¹. The second edition was itself a response to Matthew Stevenson's 1680 *The Wits Paraphrased*, also reprinted within a year⁸². Both travesties contained a preface parodying Dryden's. Stevenson's volume even included a mock-translation "by another hand", which literally reproduced the first pages of the previous (burlesque) version, before advising the reader to waste no more time in "troubulous repetition"⁸³. Dryden's preface was also ridiculed—although indirectly—in Matthew Prior's 1685 *Satyr on the Modern Translators*, whose piques were mainly aimed at Otway's and Behn's "paraphrases" of Ovid⁸⁴.

Beyond the typical Augustan taste for travesties, Dryden's essay on translation was commended by influential authors, such as Oldham, who declared his translation of "The Passion of Byblis" from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1681) to be inspired by the precedent of *Ovid's Epistles*⁸⁵. The impact of Dryden's remarks on translation was again to show in Oldham's preface to his "imitation" of Horace's *Art of Poetry* (1684), where the poet claimed to have to have tempered his modernising manner by close adherence to the "sense" of Horace's poem⁸⁶. In 1682, Thomas Hoy published a translation of Ovid's *Art of Love*, with a preface also commending Dryden's preface to *Ovid's Epistles*⁸⁷.

Not all voices were in praise of Dryden's practice of translation, though. In the preface to *Sylvae* (1685), Dryden's next contribution to Tonson's miscellanies, the translator borrows John Denham's arguments in order to defend his additions to the original text: "I desire the False Critics wou'd not always think that those thoughts are

⁷⁹ Dryden, *Ovid's Epistles*, 10-11.

⁸⁰ For a complete list of the editions of *Ovid's Epistles* by Tonson and his successors, see Andreadis, "The Early Modern Afterlife of Ovidian Erotics: Dryden's *Heroides*", 404-405 and 414-416. By the mid-1720s, the Dryden/Tonson edition "had proved itself a lucrative enterprise"(404), and it was reprinted regularly until 1795.

⁸¹ The complete title reads *Ovid travestie, a burlesque upon Ovid's Epistles*.

⁸² The title here explicitly refers to the 1680 miscellany: *The Wits paraphras'd, or, Paraphrase upon paraphrase in a burlesque on the several late translations of Ovid's Epistles*.

⁸³ Stevenson, *The Wits paraphrased*, 141.

⁸⁴ Prior jibes in passing at "midwife Dryden" before railing against Otway's infelicities and Behn's supposed ignorance of Latin.

⁸⁵ Oldham, *Satyrs upon the Jesuits*, sig. A4^r.

⁸⁶ Oldham, *Some new pieces*, sig. a^v.

⁸⁷ Hoy, *Two essays*, sig. [a3]^r.

wholly mine, but that either they are secretly in the Poet, or may fairly be deduc'd from him"⁸⁸.

The main attack on Dryden's theory and practice of translation was to be formulated a century later, in Alexander Tytler's 1790 *Essay on the Principles of Translation*. In Chapter IV, "Of the freedom allowed in Poetical translation", Tytler judges Dryden according to latter's own criteria, charging him with all the faults of "imitation", and describing him as a translator of "genius" yet unfaithful to the "character" of the original, who by his additions and omissions "destroy(ed) the beauty" of his authors, and was guilty of promoting "licence beyond all bounds" among English translators⁸⁹.

8. Note on the text.

The text below includes the first two sentences of Dryden's discussion of translation, which are usually omitted in translation studies "readers". It seemed important to underline the links that tie Dryden's remarks on translation with his analysis of Ovid's literary style. Besides, as noted above, Dryden's advertisement of a translation "by divers hands" gives an essential clue for the interpretation of Dryden's text in terms of the specific genre of the miscellany.

The text is based on Tonson's first edition of *Ovid's Epistles* (1680). Although many an argument has been made in favour of a modernised edition of Dryden's writings⁹⁰, a conservative rendition of the spelling and pointing in the 1680 edition appeared consistent and transparent enough not to create major difficulties for the average reader, while preserving the documentary value of Dryden's text as it was first made available to the Augustan public.

⁸⁸ Denham writes in his preface to *The Destruction of Troy* (1654): "where [my] expressions are fuller than his [Virgil's], they are but the impression that the often reading of him, has left upon my thoughts; so that if they are not his Conceptions, they are at least the result of them..."

⁸⁹ Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, p. 102, 136, 105 and 53 respectively.

⁹⁰ See for example Hammond, Preface to *The Poems of John Dryden*, vol.1; and Hopkins, "Editing, Authenticity and Translation", *passim*.

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