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Contesting the Classic: The Politics of Translation Practice

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Navigating the Realms of Gold: Translation as Access Route to the Classics

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ANCESTORS

Even after several decades of radical change, Classics as a subject-area and a constituent of the curriculum still stands in urgent need of redefining its role now that so many courses are taught primarily, or indeed exclusively, through the medium of modern-language translations.¹ But even if we acknowledge the prevalence of teaching in translation at undergraduate level,² we are still in danger of understating the importance of the provision of translations into modern languages as a formative element in the creation of the contemporary curriculum: ancient authors who can be accessed in a reliable and above all inexpensive translation are far more likely to be selected for inclusion on the syllabus than those who can't. The very shape of the education offered by classicists is increasingly dictated not by the availability of editions of the original texts (the most important criterion until a few years ago), but by the availability of a suitable translation in a cheap mass-market edition. Yet by a strange paradox, whatever appears on formal syllabuses, in the third millennium many people's first contact with ancient texts is via much older translations, which are out of copyright and therefore can be made available freely online.

Readers of the ancient world in translation need to investigate, identify, historically contextualize, and celebrate their own ancestors in order to realize

¹ Early twentieth-century experiments with teaching classics in translation even within Classics departments have recently been documented as occurring at the University of Birmingham as well as in Canada by Todd (2000). The whole of the current chapter is also much indebted to the clear and timely exposition of many of the issues it addresses in Hardwick (2000a).

² There is a crucial distinction to be drawn here: in my view *postgraduate* research in Classics and Ancient History will always require knowledge of the original language in which the major texts under scrutiny were composed.

that they belong to a time-honoured, fascinating, and often heroic tradition that, however, needs to be handled with care. People have been reading the Greeks and Romans in their own languages since the invention of the printing press, often with pleasure, passion, and a sense of commitment to personal or social change. And research into the *history* of the important role played by modern-language translations in the study of the ancient world has been facilitated by the more systematic study of reading culture which has developed amongst social historians over the last three decades. The contribution of such influential organizations as (in Britain) the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, for example, has begun to be documented and appreciated.³ The impact of canonical works dependent on (rather than translated from) classical authors is appreciated above all in France, where many people's reading knowledge of the classics was for centuries derived mainly from Fénelon's *Télémaque* and the plays of Racine and Corneille; works by all three of these authors featured amongst the thirty most cited titles in a French Ministry of Education questionnaire on rural reading filled in by prefects in 1866 (*Télémaque* even made twelfth place).⁴ Other scholars have noted the role played by *illustrated* texts in inviting illiterate or semi-literate people to take an interest in the classics.⁵ An early eighteenth-century French farm-boy from Lorraine, by name of Valentin Jamerey-Duval, was illiterate until he came across an illustrated edition of *Aesop's Fables*. So drawn was he to the visual images that he asked some of his fellow-shepherds to explain the stories, and subsequently to teach him to read the book. As a result he developed an insatiable appetite for reading, and became a librarian to the Duke of Lorraine.⁶

More attention has also been paid to books designed for widely dispersed and indeed working-class readers which offered instructive 'digests' of ancient classics, such as the excerpts from Aristotle, Polybius, and Cicero included in *The Political Experience of the Ancient: in its Bearing upon Modern Times*, published by the educationalist Seymour Tremenheere in 1852.⁷ The cultural importance at all levels of society of *Aesop's Fables*, historically one of the most widely read texts after the Bible, has been begun to be acknowledged.⁸ In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Ulster, the bags of books touted round

³ See e.g. Webb (1971) 66–7; Vincent (1989) 85, 110–11, 192.

⁴ Lyons (2001) 164–5; see also the description of the reading matter enjoyed by carpenters on p. 60.

⁵ Richter (1987) 20–2.

⁶ Lyons (2001) 49.

⁷ See Webb (1971) 97. Tremenheere omitted Plato on the ground that the ideas in the *Republic* might foment socialist agitation.

⁸ See e.g. Vincent (1989) 89.

even the humblest of cottages by chapmen, or itinerant booksellers, certainly included Aesop's *Fables* but also—more surprisingly—a version of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*.⁹ Other reading enjoyed by the 'common man' in Northern Ireland included a version of Musaeus' poem *Hero and Leander*, a history of Troy descended from the *Recuyell of the histories of Troye* printed by Caxton, and (for reasons of theology as much as a desire for classical learning) Josephus' *History of the Jewish War*.¹⁰ A study of family libraries in rural New England reveals the small but persistent presence of translations of Virgil, of Pope's translation of the Homeric epics, of Horace, and (as in Northern Ireland) of Josephus. These almost certainly commanded the attention of women as well as men: the 'Female Department' of the academy at Chester, New England, which opened in the late 1820s, offered a challenging syllabus that included instruction not only in ancient history but also in Latin and Greek.¹¹

The history of *literary* translation has of course been infinitely better served than other types. The term 'literary translation' seems to mean a version, usually of ancient poetry rather than prose, produced with the intention of creating a text that is itself aesthetically valuable (or at least without obvious aesthetic demerit). The study of the literary translation of Greek and Latin poets into English was facilitated by the anthology edited by Poole and Maule (1995), a model of good sense and judgement. And the publication in 2005 and 2006 of two of the intended five volumes of *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English* (more precisely, of the two volumes covering the period from the Restoration until 1900) has made it possible as never previously for the scholarly community to focus its attention on the processes by which some ancient Greek and Roman authors (along with French, Italian, German, and Spanish ones) first became able to communicate with English-speakers in their own English tongue. The ideas about the history of translation from the ancient Mediterranean classics underlying the current chapter were in gestation long before I became aware of the ongoing work of the editors of these volumes—Peter France, Stuart Gillespie, and their colleagues. But several of the issues explored below do not relate to 'literary' translation at all, and some of the others can perhaps still usefully be emphasized once again, in the belief that future research—at least where English-language translation is concerned—has now been made considerably easier by the availability of the materials and insights assembled by these scholars.

In the case of a few ancient authors perceived to be central to the canon—usually poets rather than prose writers—there have, of course, been concentrated

⁹ J. Adams (1987), 50, 103. The Ovid volume was entitled *Ars Amandi; or, Ovid's Art of Love*, and was printed in Belfast in 1777 by James Magee.

¹⁰ J. Adams (1987) 58–9, 85, 183, 185. ¹¹ Gilmore (1989) 64–7.

studies of historically and aesthetically significant individual translations. A few discrete topics within the history of literary translation have been studied in depth and often. In departments that study Literature in English all over the world it has been translation of Homer that has attracted by far the most attention, as scholars have followed in the footsteps of Joseph Spence's essay on Pope's *Odyssey* (1726–7), and the famous controversy between Matthew Arnold and F. W. Newman.¹² Notable examples of publications in this area include both histories of the translation of Homer,¹³ and fascinating studies of the impact of individual versions, such as Chapman's Homer (1612) and Alexander Pope's *Iliad* (1715) and *Odyssey* (1725).¹⁴ It is a shame that the excellent series published from the mid-1990s onwards by Penguin under the general editorship of Christopher Ricks, *Poets in Translation*, only covered one Greek poet (Homer) and a handful of Roman ones (Horace, Martial, Virgil, Catullus, Seneca, Catullus), before being prematurely cancelled.¹⁵ But that series was only ever intended to concern itself with poets—and 'great' poets at that, who had historically attracted extremely ambitious translators, themselves almost exclusively motivated by aesthetic (and financial) considerations.

OBSTACLES

In 1748 the Earl of Chesterfield wrote to his son, 'Classical knowledge, that is, Greek and Latin, is absolutely necessary for everybody... the word *illiterate*, in its common acceptance, means a man who is ignorant of these two languages.'¹⁶ In a series of breathtaking acts of rhetorical exclusion, classical knowledge is here limited to linguistic knowledge, education to men, and literacy to reading competence in Greek and Latin. These distinctions help to explain the absence of excitement amongst classical scholars around the history of modern-language translation, at least beyond the treatment of canonical ancient poets by equally canonical post-Renaissance authors. It

¹² Both men's essays are usefully collected in e.g. Arnold (1905).

¹³ See e.g. Burns (2002) and especially Young (2003).

¹⁴ On Chapman see e.g. deForrest Lord (1956); Sowerby (1992); on Pope see e.g. Williams (1992).

¹⁵ Virgil: Gransden (1996); Horace: Carne-Ross and Haynes (1996); Martial: Sullivan and Boyle (1996); Ovid: Martin (1998); Seneca: Share (1998); Catullus: Gaisser (2001); Homer: Steiner (1996). Fiona Macintosh and I are preparing a volume with a similar format, entitled *Greek Tragedy in English*, to be published in due course by Blackwell.

¹⁶ See Stanhope (1932) iii. 1155 (letter of 27 May), and the fascinating discussion of eighteenth-century reading of the classics in P. Wilson (1982).

can partly be explained by the longstanding status of the classics as the exclusive property of an educated elite, and knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages as passport to an intellectual club that (although arguably international) was socially narrow. During the nineteenth century, as Stray, Majeed, and recently Vasunia have demonstrated, training in Greek and Latin, at least in Britain, became identified with the preparation of young British males for administering the British empire.¹⁷ Reading authors who wrote in these languages in a modern-language translation was regarded with horror, and the practice routinely denigrated. It may be now well over a century since Gilbert Murray bravely stated in his inaugural lecture at the University of Glasgow in 1889 that ‘Greece and not Greek is the real object of our study.’¹⁸ Yet in Canada in the 1920s, ‘the mere thought of ancient literature in translation would have been as repellent as . . . allowing women to smoke in public—wearing trousers.’¹⁹

Radicalized working-class readers had by the twentieth century long been encouraged by their union leaders and middle-class philanthropists to use translations in order to acquire some knowledge of the ancient classics and thus defend themselves against the nefarious educated classes who exploited them.²⁰ The politicization—indeed, blindingly obvious class identification—of the distinction between the different access routes to the classics produced a pronounced prejudice amongst most establishment scholars against being discovered studying the ancient authors even with the *aid* of a translation. This prejudice still blighted the lives of undergraduates reading *Literae Humaniores* at Oxford as late as the 1980s. I know this personally from the sharp response I received from a tutor when I asked where I might find help with comprehending the papyrus texts of Greek lyric poets placed before me in photocopy, and above all from the humiliating experience of being asked to leave a lecture on Sophocles for daring to take in a paperback translation (in addition to my Greek text, I still find myself hastening to add, not instead of it). The ritual denigration of the use of translation is in turn related to the considerable number of samizdat ‘cribs’ published in the nineteenth century in order to help struggling youths stagger their way through the horrors of, for example, Aeschylean choral lyric;²¹ parasitical on this presumably lucrative

¹⁷ See Stray (1997); Majeed (1999); Larson (1999); Vasunia (2005).

¹⁸ Murray (1889), and D. Wilson (1987) 43–4.

¹⁹ The words of Malcolm Francis McGregor, Head of Classics at the University of British Columbia (1954–75), recalling his undergraduate days, as quoted as the epigraph to Todd (2001).

²⁰ See Rose (2001) 26.

²¹ Postgate (1922) 18 n. 1, cites the definition of ‘crib’ offered by the *New English Dictionary* (unspecified date) to which he had access: ‘A translation of a classic or other work in a foreign language for the illegitimate use of students.’ On the identity of the translators who produced the cribs, see further Foster (1966) pp. xxi–xxii.

market in cribs was another one, equally interesting, in humorous and irreverent parodies and burlesques of the worthy ancient texts.²²

Yet the argument from social exclusion does not fully explain why the history of translation should be missing from classics: other factors have been equally important. One has been the fear of the pagan in a Christian world; witness the defensive tone adopted by George Adams in the Preface to his English prose translation of all seven of Sophocles' tragedies in 1729 (the first occasion on which *Trachiniae*, *Oedipus Colonus*, and, astonishingly, *Antigone* had ever appeared in the English tongue): Adams spends a considerable amount of ink refuting the charge that tragedy as a medium 'is only suited to a State of Heathenism'.²³ Another, related (but probably more powerful) reason has been fear of these ancient pagan texts' portrayals of corrupting coarseness or immorality. Even the title page of the early English version of Plautus' *Menaechmi* by William Warner reassured the potential purchaser that this *Pleasant and fine Conceited Comædie, taken out of the most excellent wittie poet Plautus*, had been *Chosen purposely from out the rest, as least harmefull*...²⁴ Straightforward concerns about obscenity dictated the decision about which plays to translate and which merely to summarize in the English version of Father Brumoy's influential *Le Théâtre des grecs* (1730), translated into English by Charlotte Lennox and others in 1759. This work included the first translation of Aristophanes' *Frogs* into English,²⁵ but the obscenity of *Lysistrata* dictated that it was delivered up to the world only in terse summary, accompanied by dark comments warning the reader against its licentious horrors.²⁶

These topics could benefit from far more rigorous examination than they have hitherto enjoyed. For one thing is absolutely certain: the impact of the turning of the ancient Greeks and Romans into living, spoken tongues has had an impact on European culture since the Renaissance at least comparable with that of mother-tongue access to the Bible. Yet the history of the translation of the Greek and Latin classics into English enjoys no equivalent of the veritable industry attaching to the activities of John Wyclif and William Tyndale.²⁷ It is also important to stress that, like the history of the translation of the Bible, the phenomenon of the arrival of classical authors in modern

²² See further E. Hall (1999) 360–1.

²³ Adams (1729) i. 'Preface'.

²⁴ Warner (1595).

²⁵ Henry Fielding had, however, offered a surprisingly close adaptation of *Frogs* in a play-within-a-play in *The Author's Farce*, a comedy produced in 1730. See Fielding (1903) and E. Hall (2007).

²⁶ Brumoy (1759), iii. esp. 358, with the discussion of E. Hall (2007).

²⁷ See, amongst many other studies, Bruce (1961).

languages needs appreciating in its full diachronic depth. A late eighteenth-century translation of Aeschylus into English (see below) may seem an unremarkable notion, until its existence is placed in the context of a translation history in which Aeschylus had *never* been Englished before. On the other hand, the dearth of new translations of many ancient prose writers appearing in the twentieth or even the nineteenth centuries can seem even more surprising when it is discovered that they had been available in the English language by the end of the sixteenth century: Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* by 1532, the now neglected Herodian by 1550, Epictetus by 1567, Polybius by 1568, Demosthenes' *Olynthiacs* by 1570, Aelian by 1576, half of Appian by 1578, and the first two books of Herodotus by 1584.²⁸ This is without even to mention the early translations of Plutarch's *Lives* that were so important to the Renaissance theatre, and which in the case of the life of Julius Caesar reached a far wider reading public, through the conduit of Shakespeare's play, than Plutarch ever could.²⁹ Nor do the examples listed above take into account the ancient novels. Some of these, especially the minor Greek 'romances', thereafter suffered abject neglect until the late twentieth-century revision of the classical canon at last placed the ancient novel high up on the research and teaching agenda.³⁰

Translation history of the Greek and Latin classics is certainly demanding. The near impossibility of studying one period of translation into a modern language in isolation from any other was perhaps first fully appreciated by one of the few scholars to have become excited by this subject-matter previously, an American professor of English named Finley Foster. Foster records that after beginning the research for a book on translations of ancient Greek authors into English that had appeared between 1800 and 1830, it 'soon became evident, however, that there were only two possible termini for such a study: the establishment of Caxton's printing press in London in 1476 and the present year'.³¹ It could equally well be argued that no such history can be written without including *all* the major European languages, since patterns of translation show just how closely communities of translators in Italy, France, Britain, and Germany scrutinized what the others were doing. For reasons to do simply with my own previous research, most of the examples below follow

²⁸ For further details see Foster (1966).

²⁹ For Shakespeare's use of the translation by North (1579) of the French translation by Amyot (1559), see Brower (1971). The widespread presence of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* on the reading lists of working-class and autodidactic Britons is documented in Rose (2001) e.g. 94, 123; on the impact of performances of the play see *ibid.* 33 and 401.

³⁰ See the collection of excellent translations by several hands of the Greek novels in Reardon (1989).

³¹ Foster (1966) p. vii.

Foster in being drawn from the history of translation into the English language; moreover, the majority are from Greek authors rather than Latin, many are connected with drama, and the selection procedure has been unashamedly subjective and favouritist. But this reflects solely on my ignorance rather than on the relative importance of the translation history of all other genres into all other languages.

PIONEERS

Contemplating the history of translation offers hope that the classics curriculum can be constantly refreshed, as students discover that they are able to access fascinating documents of the ancient mindset that go far beyond the canonical poets, just as people who could not read Latin or Greek enjoyed such access hundreds of years ago. Oppian's useful *Halieutica*, a dissertation on the art of fishing, was translated into English in 1722, considerably before Floyer Sydenham and Thomas Taylor first Anglicized most of Plato.³² More British people seem to have wanted help with catching fish than with ontological or epistemological conundrums. Extended excerpts and paraphrases from the ancient treatises and polemics by Lucian, Choricus, and Libanius illustrative of pantomime (i.e. serious, balletic realization of the myths associated with tragedy) began to appear in handbooks on the history of dance at the precise moment when they were needed: the invention of ballet as an elevated, independent art-form at the turn of the eighteenth century.³³

Or take Artemidorus of Daldis' treatise *On the Interpretation of Dreams*, to which attention was influentially drawn in 1990 by John Winkler in *The Constraints of Desire*, and which has become increasingly fashionable amongst classical scholars exploring ancient society and its *mentalité*.³⁴ Yet it remains virtually impossible for students to read Artemidorus, whose treatise is available in only a single copy in by no means all British university libraries in the adequate English translation that Robert White (1975) published with a minor North American press. I had always assumed that White's translation, difficult as it was to track down, had nevertheless offered the first opportunity to study an English text of Artemidorus—a decidedly non-canonical author of a didactic work on what to Christian Europe had presumably represented reprehensible ancient pagan superstition. But nothing could be further from the truth. A post-Renaissance European market for ancient dream

³² See J. Jones (1722). ³³ See further Hall (forthcoming a).

³⁴ See Winkler (1990) 14–44 and e.g. Bradley (1994) 140–5.

interpretation obviously existed long before a market for, say, most of Plato or for Aeschylean tragedy: Artemidorus found his way out of Greek early and with relative frequency. *On the Interpretation of Dreams* had been translated into Latin by 1539 (as a point of contrast, well before Aeschylus' tragedies in 1555), Italian by 1542, French by 1581, and English by 1606.³⁵ This was nearly two centuries before Aeschylus was first translated into English; astonishingly, Artemidorus could even be read in Welsh before the end of the seventeenth century.³⁶ Presumably this reflected a real interest in Artemidorus' diagnosis of dreams, rather than in his prose style. Moreover, even the casual reader of Artemidorus in English, consulting him in order to analyse a recent dream, will have picked up a considerable amount of educational information about domestic and civic life in the eastern provinces of the Roman empire.

A further point that needs emphasizing is the deep cultural penetration of ancient authors little read today, a penetration that can be fully appreciated only by paying attention to the history of translation. One of the most formative of all ancient books when it comes to the forging of the medieval and early modern male personality was the so-called *Distichs of Cato*, which contained moralizing *sententiae* dating from the third or fourth century AD and erroneously attributed to the great republican Stoic Cato the Elder (Marcus Porcius Cato). Benedict Burgh made these distichs available to English-speaking schoolchildren in verses composed in their own tongue as early as 1477, and they were still being read in another edition by the young Benjamin Franklin at Boston Latin School more than two centuries later. One assiduous Latin master, Charles Hoole, in the later seventeenth century produced a book in which the Latin of the distichs was interspersed line-by-line with his English translation, so that children could imbibe republican Stoic morals even before they were fully competent at Latin: Hoole's title was *Cato construed grammatically, with one row Latine and another English. Whereby little children may understandingly learn the rules of common behaviour* (1659).

Yet by the eighteenth century the personal morality and ideology of adults has been constituted more often in contact with Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. It was this ultimate source for the practical Roman Stoicism, applied to questions of everyday life, that resonated so profoundly in the nineteenth century, and above all with British autodidacts and with the makers of the North American self-help culture such as Dale Carnegie.³⁷ Although numerous new versions were published, it is in this case easy to point to the book that first turned Marcus Aurelius into a classic: it was Meric Casaubon's 1634 translation, *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, the Roman emperor, his Meditations*

³⁵ Cornarius (1539); Lauro (1542); Fontaine (1581); Wood (1606).

³⁶ T. Jones (1698). ³⁷ See Rose (2001), 34, 57, 260; E. Hall (forthcoming b).

concerning himself, published in 1634. This seminal work, a profound attempt to marry pagan Stoicism with a certain brand of liberal Protestant humanism, was repeatedly reprinted, set the standard for all subsequent translations, and itself remained in print until the mid-twentieth century.³⁸

Casaubon's translation of Marcus Aurelius was not the first attempt to bring this ancient Stoic to an English-speaking readership, but Casaubon was the first to engage seriously with the Greek original, rather than producing a secondary translation from a French version. And it is certain that more energy should be spent in applauding the sheer courage involved in being the first translator to put an ancient author into any modern language. It is one thing in the third millennium to attempt a translation when standing on the shoulders of previous translators, textual editors, and commentary-writers, as well consulting all the excellent lexicographical tools and resources now available. It was quite another in 1652 for John Hall of Consett to put the complicated diction and rhetorical figures of Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime* into English for the very first time, under the title *Dionysius Longinus of the height of eloquence*. Hall's lucid, straightforward effort was remarkable for a man without overarching intellectual pretensions: he was a moderate Roundhead who wanted to curry favour with his hard-pressed patron, Lord Whitelocke (currently engaged in a complicated battle of wills with Oliver Cromwell after objecting to the execution of Charles I), by furnishing him with some refuge from 'the Hurricans of these great Transactions'.³⁹ Yet this does not stop Sappho scholars (who, instead of actually consulting Hall's rare little book, just derivatively take their cue from previous books on Sappho) from routinely pouring scorn on Hall's rendering of the famous poem 'He seems to me to be equal to the gods', which is preserved in the Longinian treatise. Admirers of literary women could, however, be encouraged instead to celebrate pioneering female translators, especially since it has always been women *readers* who have been amongst the chief beneficiaries of translated classics.⁴⁰ The spirit of the translation pioneer suffuses both Lucy Hutchinson's deft, poetic Lucretius, written during the Interregnum, and the remarkable Anne Dacier's early eighteenth-century French translations of authors no English-speaking woman would have dared to go near before the twentieth century (Plautus, Aristophanes, Homer).⁴¹

The sheer hard grind involved in translating extended texts in ancient languages also needs to be better acknowledged. Philemon Holland was a

³⁸ Casaubon (1908), (1949). ³⁹ J. Hall (1652), 'Preface'.

⁴⁰ See esp. Thomas (1994) 19–67, a fascinating study of women's responses to Pope's *Iliad*.

⁴¹ Hutchinson's translation of Lucretius' *de Rerum Natura* has been published in a recent edition by de Quehen (1996). On Anne Dacier see Farnham (1976) and Santangelo (1984). Another important eighteenth-century translation by a woman was Elizabeth Carter's (1758)

seventeenth-century Coventry physician who between 1601 and 1632 waded his way through thousands of pages of Greek and Latin prose in order to translate into accurate and readable English not only Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, but Plutarch's *Moralia*, Suetonius, Ammianus Marcellinus, and Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*. This is an astonishing achievement, especially since several of Holland's translations are still in use.⁴² Another pioneer was Francis Adams, a Scottish doctor who worked in a remote village general practice in Aberdeenshire, but between 1844 and 1856 produced several substantial and seminal English-language translations of Hippocrates and other major medical writers. He was able to achieve this only by working throughout the night. He later translated much of Hippocrates and Aretaeus the Cappadocian, but his first significant publication was the three-volume *The Seven Books of Paulus Aegineta, Translated from the Greek, with a Commentary* in 1844–7.⁴³ Paul of Aegina's compendium is of unrivalled importance both in the history of the development of surgical theory and as a conduit through which ancient medical doctrine passed through Byzantium. Adams's translation has yet to be superseded.

Some pioneering translators of classics have remained undetected simply because they are well disguised. Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* made its first appearance in English-speaking culture as a Restoration heroic tragedy by the 19-year-old Charles Davenant, going under the misleading title *Circe*.⁴⁴ The earliest faithful translation of any substantial portion of any Aristophanic comedy by an Englishman was Thomas Stanley's version of *Clouds*, produced solely as an empirical source of biographical data about the figure of Socrates; it was originally published in his *The History of Philosophy* (1655). Its omissions include the editing out of 'words of...anatomical or physiological forthrightness'.⁴⁵ But an accurate enough translation of Aristophanes—if not quite a 'literary' one—it certainly is.

PERFORMANCES

Attending performances of ancient texts, or plays drawing on ancient myth and history, has always been a significant avenue by which less-well-educated

smooth and learned Epictetus. On Victorian women translators of Greek tragedy, see Hardwick (2000b).

⁴² See Considine (2004).

⁴³ See further Brown (1900) and Nutton (2004).

⁴⁴ Davenant (1677); see E. Hall and Macintosh (2005) 37–41.

⁴⁵ Hines (1966) 35. See further E. Hall (2007).

people could gain access to classical authors and culture. Yet versions of ancient Greek drama in English have on occasion, confusingly, been connected with live theatre only as comments on its conspicuous *absence*. The earliest translation of a Sophoclean tragedy into the English language was the *Electra* produced by an ardent Royalist, Christopher Wase, in order to protest against the execution of Charles I, the incarceration of his teenage daughter Princess Elisabeth, and indeed the closure of the theatres.⁴⁶ Two of the earliest Aristophanic translations into the English language were published in order to circumvent the proscription or censorship of theatre. One was by the Irish Catholic playwright Henry Burnell in 1659, when his remarkably lucid and faithful *The World's Idol. Plutus: a comedy written in Greek by Aristophanes* protested implicitly against both the closure of the Werburgh Street Theatre in Dublin and the conduct of Cromwell's army in Ireland;⁴⁷ the second was *Plutus, the god of riches: a comedy translated from the original Greek of Aristophanes, with large notes explanatory and critical* by Henry Fielding and William Young, a vehicle for criticizing Walpole's stringent new Licensing Act, which had put Fielding out of business as a man of the theatre.⁴⁸

The historian and would-be panegyrist of the history of translation of ancient Greek into modern languages has in recent decades been made increasingly aware of the importance of early translations into Latin, a language with an infinitely wider Renaissance and early modern readership. Here Aeschylus provides an illuminating example. Though the last major Greek poet to find his way into most modern languages, Aeschylus was in circulation in European intellectual circles almost as soon as the appearance of Sanravius' (i.e. Jean Saint-Ravy's) *Aeschyli poetae Vetvstissimi Tragoediae sex* in Basle in 1555. As the late Inga-Stina Ewbank pointed out in a superb study, the fact that Sanravius omitted *Agamemnon*, the first play of the *Oresteia* trilogy, had an inestimable impact on the reception of the story of the house of Atreus in Renaissance drama.⁴⁹ And other scholars are increasingly happy to accept that the influence of Greek drama on the Renaissance stage, although thoroughly mediated through Latin versions and the rumours of their contents that were in circulation, was considerably greater than it has hitherto been customary to acknowledge.⁵⁰ Although most of the influential Latin translations of difficult Greek authors were produced on the Continent, there is one rare example of a highly literary version of a play by Sophocles written in England, the poet Thomas Watson's *Antigone* (1581). This even

⁴⁶ Wase (1649).

⁴⁷ On Burnell (1659) see the discussion of Wyles (2007).

⁴⁸ See Fielding and Young (1742), with Hines (1966) 158–231; E. Hall and Macintosh (2005) 104; Hall (2007).

⁴⁹ Ewbank (2005). ⁵⁰ Schleiner (1990); Kerrigan (1996) 173–4.

attempts to produce in Latin the effect of Sophocles' lyric metres in the choral odes.⁵¹ Watson's translation informed at least one scene in Shakespeare—the appearance of Lear with Cordelia in his arms, long since believed to have been inspired by Creon's entrance, carrying Haemon's corpse, in *Antigone*.⁵²

The anti-censorship Aristophanes and the humanist Latin Aeschylus and Sophocles remind us that the history of translation, at least of ancient play-scripts, is often impossible to disentangle from the history of theatricals. The earliest version of any play by Plautus in the English language was a verse adaptation of *Amphitryo* printed in 1565 with performance by children in mind.⁵³ Translation historians have systematically ignored or forgotten the fact that such texts frequently received their first airing in a modern language for a performance of some kind: Thomas Sheridan's was the first English-language translation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (1725). It preceded by four years (and is vastly superior to) George Adams's prosaic attempt in the second volume of his complete but stolid *The Tragedies of Sophocles* (1729). Sheridan made his Sophocles specially attractive because it was designed to be distributed amongst his audience (many of whom, as fond mothers and sisters, were women) before a Greek-language production of *Philoctetes* at his Dublin school.⁵⁴ Extended passages from Euripides' *Medea* were first heard by the spectators in London theatres long before the publication of the first translation of all Euripides' surviving dramas in two volumes by Robert Potter (1781–3): both Charles Gildon's *Phaeton; or, the Fatal Divorce*, performed in 1698, and Charles Johnson's *The Tragedy of Medæa*, performed at Drury Lane three decades later, presented their audiences with scenes and speeches from the Euripidean archetype. The same can be said of Richard West's tragedy *Hecuba* (so austere in its fidelity to the original that it was an inevitable flop at Drury Lane in 1726).⁵⁵

The lateness of the translation of Aristophanes into English was noteworthy given his well-known impact on the comedies of Ben Jonson. Several of the ancient Greek comedies were completely inaccessible in English until the mid-eighteenth century; others until the early nineteenth; one or two (especially *Lysistrata*) enjoyed nothing like a faithful translation until nearly the twentieth century. Yet a remarkable early version of *Plutus*, although not first published in 1651, was written in the early 1630s by the cavalier dramatist Thomas Randolph, almost certainly for performance in a private venue. One of the 'Sons of Ben' who gathered around Jonson, Randolph thus became the

⁵¹ See Binns (1978) 146–7.

⁵² See e.g. the comments of Francklin (1759) 86 n.

⁵³ Warner (1595).

⁵⁴ Sheridan (1725).

⁵⁵ See Gildon (1698); West (1726); Johnson (1731); E. Hall and Macintosh (2005) ch. 3.

man responsible for the earliest English-language version of any Aristophanic play. His *Ploutophthalmia Ploutogamia, A pleasant comedie: entitled Hey for honesty, down with knavery* is a breathtakingly adventurous and original translation of *Plutus* to a setting in Caroline London, and combines detailed attention to the ancient plot with some irreverent and biting contemporary satire, the victims of which include both dour, corrupt Roundheads, the Levellers, avaricious Anglican clerics, and the Pope himself.⁵⁶

Indeed, it was only when attempting to write the history of performance of ancient drama on the British stage, in *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre 1660–1914*, that Fiona Macintosh and I first became fully aware of the complexities of the relationship between performance and translation since the Restoration. It is not just that many ancient dramas were first translated in relation to performance, since an excellent *adaptation* can even ultimately inspire the production of a *translation*. Take, for example, James Thomson's *Agamemnon*, an important tragedy staged at Drury Lane in 1738. Thomson, an outstanding classical scholar, had undoubtedly consulted both Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in Greek, and Thomas Stanley's Latin 'crib' (included in his scholarly edition of Aeschylus, published in 1663) as well as Seneca's *Agamemnon*.⁵⁷ But Thomson's play is a new work, which makes significant alterations in the ethical motivations and characterization of the leading roles. Its success in performance in both England and France, along with the praise bestowed on it by the German critic Gotthold Lessing in his famous treatise *Laocoön* (1766), created an interest in the Greek play that made it inevitable that modern-language translations would be attempted, and they duly appeared in French in 1770, English in 1777, and, from 1786 onwards, in German.⁵⁸

The existence of a good translation is also much more likely to lead to a performance, which in turn creates the kind of interest that results in more translations and more performances. Aristophanes was never performed in a non-adapted translation in Britain until the early 1870s, and he would have been unlikely to enjoy a performance even then had it not been for the cultural presence of John Hookham Frere's speakable, rhythmic, and idiomatic late-Georgian translation of *Frogs*, which had been republished in 1872.⁵⁹ This inherently performable version was much imitated, unconsciously or consciously, in the relatively inferior Victorian translations of Benjamin Bickley Rogers that later reached even wider audiences than Frere and were

⁵⁶ See Randolph (1651) 2, 17, 45–6 with E. Hall (2007).

⁵⁷ See further E. Hall and Macintosh (2005) 124–7; E. Hall (2005).

⁵⁸ Le Franc de Pompignan (1770); Potter (1777); Jenisch (1786); Stolberg (1802).

⁵⁹ Although first privately printed in 1839, Frere had produced his translation of *Acharnians*, *Knight*, *Birds*, and *Frogs* more than a decade earlier.

read throughout the twentieth century.⁶⁰ But it was Frere's translation that was staged in Edinburgh in an influential private theatre, whence word of the experiment spread. These discussions contributed directly to the early academic performances of ancient Greek plays in Oxford and Cambridge in the 1880s, the English-language translations of Gilbert Murray, and the twentieth-century rediscovery of Aristophanes and indeed the Greek tragedians in the professional theatre.⁶¹

There were certainly thousands whose first access to ancient Greece was through watching performances of Gilbert Murray's translations of Euripides' *Medea* and *Trojan Women* during the first four decades of the twentieth century; Murray's translations awakened interest in theatres, internationally as well as in the UK, far beyond the London avant-garde circles where they received their premières.⁶² At The People's Theatre in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (which had been founded by Norman and Edith Veitch in the premises of the local branch of the British Socialist Party, but the productions of which were attended by both local residents and undergraduates), not only three plays by Euripides, but Aristophanes' *Frogs* and even Menander's *Perikeiromene* were performed between 1931 and 1946 in Murray's translations.⁶³

MASS MARKETS

Murray's translations were repeatedly reprinted until the mid-1950s,⁶⁴ and any translation that receives wide dissemination can radically affect cultural history. It is difficult to overstate the importance to the Romantic movement and subsequently Victorian aesthetics of Robert Potter's translation of Aeschylus, which first appeared in 1777 and was reprinted or reissued in a different format many times.⁶⁵ Before that date, only a small minority of people had ever been able to read Aeschylus at all: the only tragedy by this dramatist to have been translated into English was the one written in by far the easiest Greek—*Prometheus Bound*—just four years previously.⁶⁶ Yet Potter's translation has suffered little but routine obloquy for the more than two centuries since it first appeared, much of which has been little more than

⁶⁰ See Postgate (1922) 8.

⁶¹ See E. Hall (2007); E. Hall and Macintosh (2005) 508–20.

⁶² See e.g. the collected translations of Euripides in Murray (1954).

⁶³ See Veitch (1950), 3, 6, 13, 201–8. For productions of Murray's translations in similar theatres in Canning Town and Sheffield, see Rose (2001) 80.

⁶⁴ See the collected translations of Euripides in Murray (1954).

⁶⁵ In 1778, 1779, 1809, 1812, 1819, 1831, 1833, 1886, 1892, 1895.

⁶⁶ Morell (1773).

reflex imitation of Dr Johnson's description of the work as 'verbiage'.⁶⁷ When experts in translation compare Potter unfavourably with the twentieth-century translations of Aeschylus by, for example, the poet Louis MacNeice, they never point out that Potter was actually brave enough to be the initial pioneer in the creation of English-language substitutes for the pyrotechnical effects of Aeschylean neologistic compounds and arcane diction—a task that nobody had ever felt confident enough to essay before him, and which inevitably resulted in the accumulation of adjectives to which Dr Johnson so objected.⁶⁸ Nobody can translate Aeschylus without using a lot of words.

Yet there is no rival in importance to cultural history of E. V. Rieu's novelistic prose translation of the *Odyssey*, the founding volume of the Penguin Classics series, first published for just one shilling and sixpence in 1946 (early copies were misdated 1945). By 1964 it had sold over two million copies, which was a staggering feat; sales now exceed three million. Until the publication of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Rieu's *Odyssey* actually reigned supreme as *the* bestselling paperback in the UK, whereas only two of the versions of the *Odyssey* available for the whole of the two inter-war decades had achieved sales of even three thousand copies.⁶⁹ But Rieu's translation has been repeatedly republished; it has been recorded as an audiobook; it has been abridged for children; it has been illustrated with lithographs by Elisabeth Frink; it has been excerpted and interspersed with passages from more recent authors; it has been revised by his son Christopher Rieu and reissued; it is still in print at Penguin.⁷⁰ The irony is that Penguin were initially very concerned about the financial viability of the project. But later the editor-in-chief, William Emrys Williams, downplayed Homer's role by observing that Rieu had 'made a good book better'!⁷¹

Where translations have reached very large numbers of readers through the medium of mass-market, multivolume published series, the urgency of re-appraising the actual translations can hardly be overemphasized. It is not just that older translations routinely bowdlerized or compressed their originals in ways that would be unlikely to be tolerated today.⁷² For the time has also come to examine systematically the ideological as well as the aesthetic issues involved in studying Latin or Greek authors in translation. It can be enormously important to point out to students where, for example, translators have obscured the detailed linguistic construction of gender in ancient texts by insensitive—or downright sexist—translation practice. The same can be

⁶⁷ See further Stoker (1993). ⁶⁸ See e.g. Brower (1974) 159–80.

⁶⁹ See further Sutherland (2002) 21–2.

⁷⁰ Rieu (1995); Wormald (1958); Rieu (1974), (2003).

⁷¹ Morpurgo (1979) 216.

⁷² See the remarks of Postgate (1922), especially 30–76.

said of class, or ethnicity, or metaphysics, or the portrayal of psychological illness. Translation offers the opportunity to traduce meaning as well as to transfer it into a different vocabulary and syntactical system: *traduttori traditori*. Interestingly, old and therefore copyright-free nineteenth-century translations, often those used originally in mass-market editions, have suddenly become pervasive again with the rise of the internet, and the emergence of web resources which make classic works freely available, in particular Project Gutenberg.⁷³ The values embedded in such translations need to be historically contextualized. Gutenberg and similar projects therefore make even more pressing the need to ask questions about their provenance, the social attitudes and background of the original translators, and the purposes for which they were commissioned.

The most famous mass-market classics before the foundation of Penguin Classics (besides the more academically oriented Loeb Classical Library) were the volumes of Greek and Latin authors included in Joseph Dent's *Everyman's Library*. Dent founded this ambitious series in 1906 in order to make great literature available to every kind of reader: 'the worker, the student, the cultured man, the child, the man and the woman.'⁷⁴ He was the son of a painter and decorator in Darlington, Co. Durham, who had insisted to his children that books were 'an engine of equality', and as a result Dent retained a fierce determination to sell the classics at what he always called a suitably 'democratic price'—initially just one shilling.⁷⁵ But the history of such series probably begins with the eighteen-volume *The Works of the Greek and Roman Poets, translated into English Verse*, published by Suttaby, Evance, & Fox in London, in attractive volumes designed to look as good on the bookshelf as to feel in the hand. These publishers specialized in vast, commercially motivated reprintings of material that was already in the public domain, such as their much larger *The Works of the British Poets*. The contents of their series of ancient classics was predictably dominated by Augustan favourites. It included Horace's *Odes* and *Epodes* and the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in Pope's translation (1809), Theocritus, Virgil (in Dryden's version), Pindar, Anacreon with Sappho and Musaeus (1810), Hesiod and Apollonius' *Argonautica* (1811), Lucan's *Pharsalia* (in Nicholas Rowe's version), Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Juvenal with other satirists, and Tibullus (1812). In 1813 these were all reissued

⁷³ An excellent start for those wishing to consult translations of classical authors on the Internet without cost can be made by exploring the round-up of websites at <<http://www.metronet.lib.mn.us/grants/ebooks2.cfm>>, accessed 25 March 2006. My thanks go to Richard Poynder for help on this and related issues.

⁷⁴ Dent (1928) 123.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 124; on his father *ibid.* 2, 5–11. See also his comments on putting Livy 'in the hands of the people', 137.

together, spread over eighteen volumes. The preference for epic poetry is obvious, as is the absence of dramatic poetry.

A far greater cultural impact was achieved by Henry George Bohn's *Classical Library*, founded in 1848. It was only the third of the several series by which Bohn, the son of a German immigrant to London, changed the landscape of British reading: it followed his *Standard Library*, and his *Scientific and Antiquarian Library* (1847). Subsequently he also founded the *Illustrated, Shilling, Ecclesiastical, and Philological Libraries* and the *British Classics* (1849–53). According to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1884, Bohn's books, sold at five shillings or less, 'established the habit in middle-class life, of purchasing books instead of obtaining them from a library'.⁷⁶ Bohn's books sold well in North America: Ralph Waldo Emerson said that Bohn had done 'as much for literature as railroads have done for internal intercourse'.⁷⁷ The kind of reader who makes Bohn's venture so important includes Richard Jefferies, the dairyman's son who became an influential writer. He started voraciously to read the ancient classics in Bohn's editions at the age of 18.⁷⁸ Bohn's Classical Library brought to a mass Victorian readership even previously obscure prose, such as Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (translated, with intelligent notes, by John Henry MacMahon, a Dublin churchman, in 1857), and Strabo's *Geography*, which had never before appeared in English. The last eleven books in the version published by Bohn were those which had been produced as a gargantuan labour, apparently of love, by three generations of the Falconer family—Thomas, Thomas, and William.⁷⁹

Bohn also provided income for such unsung heroes of translation history as Theodore Buckley, an impoverished freelance near-autodidact who never forgot his humiliating experience as a lower-class charity boy at Oxford: his satirical views on social class and education found trenchant expression in his novel *The Natural History of Tuft-hunters and Toadies* (1848). Buckley's translations for Bohn included Aristotle's *Poetics*, Sophocles, Euripides, Homer, and extensive revisions of earlier translations of Virgil and Horace. Another longsuffering Bohn translator was Henry Riley, who eked out a living through literary work teaching before dying in 1878 from illness caused, it was said, by 'hard mental work'. This had included translating Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Fasti*, *Tristia* (1851), and *Heroides* (1852). The *Comedies of Plautus* appeared in 1852, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, the *Comedies of Terence*, and the *Fables of Phaedrus* in 1853; with Dr John Bostock he also produced the massive six-volume *Natural History* of the elder Pliny (1855–7). A third hardworking Bohn translator was John Selby Watson, far better known as the notorious

⁷⁶ *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 5th seri. 257 (1884), 413.

⁷⁷ Mumby (1910) 400.

⁷⁸ Rossabi (2004). ⁷⁹ See Sherbo (2004).

'Stockwell Murderer' (he ended his days in penal servitude, his death sentence having been commuted), who contributed most of Xenophon, Cicero on oratory and some letters, and Quintilian. Bohn's Victorian initiative surely deserves to be considered the most important breakthrough moment in the history of making classics accessible far and wide. As recently as 1966, one American scholar could conclude his brief discussion of Bohn's Classical Library by saying that he did not need to speak of its great popularity 'for the translations have been on the shelves of almost every educated family in England and America for the last sixty years.'⁸⁰

DISCOVERIES

Exploring the history and role of mass-market translations, disinterring long-forgotten vernacular versions of classical authors, appreciating the importance of performance as access route to the classics, and applauding the hard work and courage of the pioneers in the field could therefore all have a significant role to play in breaking down the sort of prejudices that, in an era of fast-expanding higher education, lead to the study of the ancient Greeks and Romans being discarded altogether. For translation history conducted along the lines suggested above can create a sense of tradition by dispelling the notion that the study of Greek and Latin, and translation from them, have been dominated by the minority of very well-educated men—plus a few exceptional women—who could enjoy the leisure for private reading, and were somehow mysteriously endowed with an accordingly refined sensibility. Far more people have historically desired (and have been able to satisfy their desire for) access to the thoughts and texts of the ancient Greek and Latin-speaking inhabitants of the Mediterranean through translation into modern languages than through reading them in the languages of their original composition. If a reasonably reliable translation exists, the question recently asked with characteristic brilliance by Simon Goldhill—who really does need Greek?—very soon arises.⁸¹ (One might add, 'or Latin, for that matter'). Few people in the English Renaissance could read Greek, and yet one of the rare scholars to think in general terms about the history of Renaissance translations from Greek into English has concluded 'that the publishers during the latter part of the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth century evidently found Greek translations a paying proposition.'⁸² If it is permissible

⁸⁰ Foster (1966) p. xx.

⁸¹ Goldhill (2002), esp. the thoughtful conclusion on 299.

⁸² Foster (1966) p. xiv; see also Lathrop (1967).

to do anything so open to the charge of reductive methodology as define knowledge of classical texts *quantitatively*, it is unarguable that far more of them have historically been accessed far more of the time in the languages spoken by their post-Renaissance consumers than in the languages spoken in the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean two thousand years ago.

In his fine study of the reading culture of the British working class, Jonathan Rose has drawn attention to the extraordinary excitement that many individual autodidacts experienced when they began to read certain of the Greek and Latin classics (often Homer) in translation—the thrill of life-changing imaginative discovery. The Labour MP Will Crooks, who grew up in poverty in the East End of Victorian London, was dazzled by a two-penny second-hand *Iliad* (probably Pope's): 'Pictures of romance and beauty I had never dreamed of suddenly opened up before my eyes. I was transported from the East End to an enchanted land.'⁸³ It is this excitement that was earlier so memorably defined by the Greekless Keats in his rightly famous sonnet *On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer* (1816). This is a poem usually brought to general public attention when some stunning new astronomical discovery is made, and yet it is actually an expression of the psychological experience of *an English-speaking person reading an ancient author in English*.⁸⁴ Keats has been infected by Chapman's personal feeling that he had actually been inspired by the soul of Homer, and that his translation was an act comparable with necromancy: in his *Odyssey* he promised his patron no less a gift than 'Homer, three thousand yeares dead, now reviv'd'.⁸⁵ To conclude it is appropriate to quote Keats's sonnet in full, precisely because it is such an intense and intellectually engaged celebration of the very way of accessing the classics that has historically been denigrated, and it can therefore serve as a manifesto for every student or layperson about to open an electronic text or a paperback translation of any classical author in the hope that it will 'speak out loud and bold' across the centuries:

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:

⁸³ Quoted in Haw (1917) 22; see further Rose (2001) 4–5, 38–9 (on the Chartist Thomas Cooper), and 95 (on the stonemason Hugh Miller).

⁸⁴ See also the slightly different interpretation of the poem in Goldhill (2002) 186–7.

⁸⁵ Chapman (1615), 'Epistle Dedicatorie', F I'; see deForrest Lord (1956) 16.

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Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
 When a new planet swims into his ken;
 Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
 He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

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