Perspicuitas

Virgil Re-Made in Twelfth-Century Romance

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> "The ship on which Theseus sailed with the youths and returned in safety […] was preserved by the Athenians down to [around 300 BCE]. They took away the old timbers from time to time, and put new and sound ones in their places, so that the vessel became a standing illustration for the philosophers in the mooted question of growth, some declaring that it remained the same, others that it was not the same vessel." – Plutarch, *Theseus*, 23.1[1]

With the anonymous medieval French *Roman d'Énéas* we have a fine example of Theseus' ancient ship restored under the watchful eyes of the Athenian philosophers. Was Virgil thus medievalized? Indeed, and it happened in the mid-twelfth century, probably under the patronage of Henry II Plantagenet and Eleanor of Aquitaine. The rogue romance we refer to is a work that is either a careful re-telling of the Trojan hero Aeneas' adventures or an altogether new account of the young Caesar's avatar (i. e., Augustus) Is it a faithful rendering or a betrayal? The same or not? The following remarks attempt to answer such questions.

The text belongs to an innovative twelfth-century genre referred to as the "Romances of Antiquity," in which one can observe the unmistakable impact of humanistic renewal upon the process of vernacularization. In them as well one can grasp the palpable freedom these harbinger texts exercised with regard to their sacred models. However, it remains to be determined whether these reworkings will fit into the context of rhetoric, hermeneutics and academic discourse so artfully illuminated by Rita Copeland.[2] For contextualization, we include here the *Thebes* and *Troy* romances, as well as the triad adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[3] Indeed, one wonders if these romances and tales and of course the *Eneas* romance itself may be said to challenge by a kind of hermeneutic and ideological replication the established Latinate continuity. One could affirm that the aim was to substitute for, effect a rupture with and thus ap-

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[1] <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/Theseus*.html#ref29> Accessed 16 March 2014.

[2] Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vemacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), passim, pp. 103-07.

[3] *Le Roman de Thèbes*, ed. and trans. into Modern French by Aimé Petit (Paris: Champion, 2008); see also the earlier edition by Francine Mora-Lebrun (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1995; Lettres Gothiques). Benoît de Sainte-Maure, *Le Roman de Troie*, abbreviated ed. and trans. into Modern French by Emmanuèle Baumgartner and Françoise Vieilliard (Paris: Livres de Poche, 1998; Lettres Gothiques). *Piramus and Thisbé, Narcisus and Dané, Philomena and Procné*, ed., trans. R. Cormier in *Three Ovidian Tales of Love* (New York: Garland, 1986).

propriate in an metonymic or metaphoric mode, the privileged discourse of the Classical *auctores.* But that idea remains to be developed—lack of space here will keep our discussion confined to the methods of adaptation in the *Roman d'Énéas.*[4]

In the 1920s, Charles Homer Haskins demonstrated in two landmark studies that the new twelfth-century modality—a kind of birth of medieval humanism—received its impetus from a notable scientific revival.[5] More importantly, Haskins raises a second issue which deserves our notice in this context, namely, the literalness of typical medieval translations. He emphasizes that they are faithful to the original, "so not to obscure the truth," he writes (*Science*, p. 233), as the style of works translated into Latin remains dependent on the original. But what we find in the *Roman d'Énéas* is a remarkably fierce independence of style, so that the divergences, or anomalies, as I have called them elsewhere, appear intentional in many cases. If this is so, it remains for future scholarship to uncover the detail, to discover the models and the author's rationale for his work.

In the *Eneas*, much of the Virgilian mythological scheme has been eliminated, although the anonymous does follow the *Aeneid*, while the religious, political and dynastic aims—the Latin epic's august pretext—have been subtly transformed for his Norman-Angevin patrons. To reach his audience more effectively, the adaptor has transfigured many characters and situations into a medieval context—such methodology in translation studies is called *compensation*. The work is a creative rather than a literal adaptation—the pagan Saracen princess is thus transformed.[6] On the other hand, in place of the suppressions, he has inserted significant moral amplifications on, for example, the Judgment of Paris or the "Venus and Mars surprised by Vulcan" episodes

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[4] See now, Raymond J. Cormier, *The Methods of Medieval Translators: A Comparison of the Latin Text of Virgil's Aeneid with its Old French Adaptations* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).

[5] Haskins, *Studies in the History of Mediaeval Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924), hereafter cited as *Science*; see also his classic *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1927). More recently, Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny, "Translations and Translators," *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. G. Constable, R. Benson, and C. Lanham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1982), pp. 421-462. See esp. E. Faral, *Recherches sur les sources latines des romans et contes courtois* (Paris: Champion, 1913), for full details on all these matters (hereafter cited as *Recherches).*

[6] See Jennifer Goodman, *Chivalry and Exploration, 1298-1630* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 1998), pp. 126, 193, 210. On the subject of adaptation, to follow on the recent remarks of celebrated conductor John Elliott Gardiner: "[…] In the 1920s […] the freedom of the interpreter began to be curtailed by composers demanding exact adherence to an ever-more-precisely notated text. 'It represents the absolute break of the tradition from Monteverdi to early Stravinsky, whereby the interpreter has freedom to use gesture and rhetoric and passion to articulate, vary and embellish what's written down,' Mr. Gardiner said. 'If you think about it, the written page of music is so limiting. It's one stage: the moment when the butterfly is being pinned to the board and chloroformed. What you are trying to do as a conductor is to get to the previous stage, where it is still fluid in the imagination of a composer.'" Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, "Crops and Music, Each in Its Season—John Elliott Gardiner and Period Music," *New York Times*, 5 Apr. 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/07/arts/music/john-eliot-gardiner-and-period-music.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1& Accessed 9 April 2013.

(structurally and thematically crucial to his story),[7] as well as many "marvels of antiquity" that draw on a panoply of ancient sources.[8] His visionary story of reciprocal love, where Eneas becomes enamored with his future bride Lavine, draws principally on Ovidian sources and intersects with the battlefield scenes in the latter episodes, with clashes in Italy between native Rutulians and newly-arrived Trojans. Some critics have famously censored this romance as a travesty of Virgil, but that simplistic view has repeatedly been dismissed by contemporary scholarship since the 1970s.[9] Like his scriptorium compatriots the *Eneas* author sometimes adapts, sometimes alters and sometimes completes the source's meaning.[10] Still, I doubt the existence of incommensurability between Virgil's classic and the Old French vernacular adaptation.[11]

But how does the romance stand up to the scrutiny of translation theory? The inspired German thinker W. Benjamin, in his "Task of the Translator" (first Englished in 1968), theorized the practice in this way:

> The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. [...] Unlike a work of literature translation does not find itself in the center of the language forest but on the outside; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.[12]

Benjamin's point is that translatability inheres in poetic texts but not in merely utilitarian ones. He proposed a focused reverberation (14), and he set in addition a messianic goal for any serious approach to translation—a quest for perfect universal language leading up or back to God's memory. Thus the translated work marks a stage in the original's afterlife. It completes the original, as language is viewed as a heap of fragments of a broken vessel which, reassembled in a work of art or a translation, reveal inner Platonic integrity and, one might say in today's technological jargon, synergy.[13] To be recognizable, the glued-together vessel should "lovingly" reflect and

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[7] On the Judgment of Paris and the Venus-Vulcan episode, see Cormier, *The Methods*…, pp. 184-187, 195-202. See also Nolan's essay.

[8] See Cormier, "Of Strange Amphibians, Extraordinary Echoes, and a Curious Miniaturization," *Carte Romanze* (Milan), forthcoming.

[9] See, for example, Philippe Logié, *L'Énéas, une traduction au risque de l'invention*, Paris, Champion, 1999 (Nouvelle Bibliothèque du Moyen Âge, 48); Francine Mora-Lebrun, *'Metre en romanz': Les Romans d'antiquité du XIIe siècle et leur postérité (XIIIe-XIVe siècle)*, Paris, Champion, 2008 (Moyen Age-Outils de Synthèse, 3); Aimé Petit, *Naissances du roman: Les Techniques littéraires dans les romans antiques du XIIe siècle*, Paris et Genève, Champion-Slatkine, 1985 (Atelier national—Reproduction des thèses. Université de Lille III).

[10] Angeli argues that there was a workshop supported by the Norman-Angevin crown which produced these various vernacular versions.

[11] For this idea, see Howard Sankey. "Kuhn's Changing Concept of Incommensurability," *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 44 (1993): 759–74.

[12] Benjamin, Walter. "Die Aufgabe des Ubersetzers," *Illuminationen*, Frankfurt-am-Main, Suhrkamp, 1923 [RP 1955]; translated in "The Task of the Translator: An Introduction to the Translation of Baudelaire's Tableaux Parisiens," In *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 69-82; here 72.

[13] See Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven, London: Yale UP, 1993), 242-59.

"imitate" the original. Studying this process in the *Enéas* romance allows us—to echo John Elliott Gardiner's thought—to capture, as it were, the fluidity in the adapter's stylus.

Strategies here may range from formal or verbal equivalence to functional or dynamic equivalence, not to mention paraphrase. The linguist R. Jakobson limits translation approaches to three: *rewording*, i. e., intralingual, "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language." *Translation proper*, or interlingual, which involves "interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language." Lastly, there is "intersemiotic translation or *transmutation*," which is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems."[14]

Interestingly and with reference to translating epigrams into English, the Russian theorist also writes of the importance of translating poetic punning (sometimes called paranomasia), which reigns over poetic art, and, whether its rule is absolute or limited, poetry by definition being untranslatable. What should be examined, then, are features like polysemy, punning, hyponymy, cultural or textual allusions, and quotations.

After Babel, the classic study by the eminent G. Steiner,[15] rejects purely linguistic equivalencies and stands as a monument to unique sense- seeking hermeneutic analysis. But following the pragmatic notions of Vinay and Darbelnet, translation involves some seven techniques or strategies (*procédés*), such as, for direct translation, borrowing, imitation, literalness; and for oblique translation, transposition, modulation, equivalence and adaptation.[16]

On another, cultural, level, if a French writer says his character, a pilot, is flying his plane over a *langue de chat* (an image meaning a peninsula here, but referring to a type of French pastry), the literal translation will make no sense; a gifted translator might propose something like "ladyfinger" to replace the word and the image at once, thus making it *meaningful* to English readers. Each culture has its own unique set of cognitive processes, just as it has its own conceptions of literary expectation and distinctive way of organizing time and space.[17]

Louis Kelly,[18] in his *The True Interpreter*, emphasizes the dual role of interpretation in the act of translation. In his view, two approaches to the equivalence sought by the translator are possible, and language is both tool and environment in communication. The linguistic/instrumental model complements the cognitive/hermeneutic

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[14] Roman Jakobson, *Language in Literature*, ed. Krystyna Pomorska and Stephen Rudy (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1987), 429.

[15] *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (New York and London: Oxford UP, 1975), esp. 296–303.

[16] See Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean-Louis Darbelnet. *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (Paris and Montréal : Didier-Beauchemin-Stock, 1958), esp. 46–55.

[17] See, for example, Don Le Pan, *The Cognitive Revolution in Western Culture*: *I. The Birth of Expectation* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Engl.: Macmillan, 1989), 3, 73–81; Edward T. Hall, *The Dance of Life: The Other Dimension of Time* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday/Anchor, 1984), 20–43.

[18] Kelly, *The True Interpreter*: *A History of Translation Theory and Practice in the West* (New York: St. Martins, 1979), 25.

mode, the former arising from an Aristotelian, Latin-Patristic, and axiological herit-age, the latter from Platonic, experiential, and more recent quasi-mystical German tradition. Kelly reiterates the vital hermeneutic theory of Martin Buber and applies it to translation: "to experience something is to change it; so that [...] experience with language changes it" (31). Kelly also argues for a holistic theory of translation that fuses both the "instrumental" and the "hermeneutic" theories of language. He writes: "One must go beyond [...] the linguist's analysis of technique [... and ask the question:] what do I experience in the reaction between this person's [or text's] language and mine? what are the values?" (33). In Jakobson's terms: *What is the message*?

And so, the repairs effected over the years to the galley of Theseus can be appre-ciated as an effort to re-make the ancient ship, taken thereafter either as brand new or as a restoration. Similarly, American culture we are told now has been finely re-engi-neered and preserved "in loving detail" by today's Japanese, embodying values appre-ciated "as refracted through a foreign and clarifying prism."[19]

Before we bring this essay to a conclusion, let us step back for a moment and con-sider a different approach, looking at the romance as an archeological site, stimulated by Michel Foucault's work,[20] then the "archeological contradictions" we have identified within the text—that is, imaginative divergences from Virgil's Latin text—become cru-cial bits of detailed investigatory evidence. We too, like Stanford archeologist Ian Hod-der, have been guided by "'the hermeneutic spiral,'" the idea that neither the whole nor the parts of anything can be understood without consideration of both. For [Hodder] this means, 'As things begin to fit more—the bits of evidence you have that you can fit together—the more you can say 'I really believe in this and I no longer believe in that.'" […] As Foucault suggested over forty years ago, Hodder "is trying to extrapolate knowledge from the details" […]. By studying, reviving and making palpable the Old French romance as we do—and yet not "pining the butterfly to the board"—the pro-cesses of adaptation are revealed in full light, fully assembled. Clarified, given distinc-tion, and thus protected.[21]

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[19] See Tom Downey, "Re-Made in Japan: How Japan Copied American Culture and Made it Better," *Smithsonian* magazine, Vol. 45 (Apr 2014), 1, 52-59, here 58.

[20] Following Michel Foucault, *L'Archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, *The Archeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

[21] See "What Happened Here? A Stone Age City Thrived for More than a Millennium, Then Vanished. Ian Hodder is Leading a 25-year Investigation," Stanford Magazine, March/April 2014; https://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article/?article_id=68851 Accessed 22 April 2014.

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