

ALEKSANDRA MANČIĆ  
CHILDREN OF SCIENCE

In order to tell you this story about translation, I am using all my linguistic abilities and skills, I am translating and solving a puzzle of texts read and intertwined, and rearranging it in a new text. This new text is a translation, it speaks as a translation, and it becomes, now, by this gesture, by my translating a text already (but not always) written in Serbian, a text originally written (always already) as a translation, and a translation in English. This text is willing to speak about translation in Europe, and it finds its way in several languages, always betraying its translational origins, obviously showing that it was not conceived in English. And I say, *this text is willing*, it is not me, because the thing this text is talking about was not originally my experience of translation. Only now, in English, as my translation, this text becomes a part of my experience of translation. It is my *reading* of the texts of others, speaking about their experiences with translation, about person or persons and time and times that could have been universal testimonies. Or, I could say that I choose a time that I read as a time analogous to ours. I chose persons capable to give testimony about that time, similar to ours. I choose languages which I read; I choose a language into which I translate, here and now. The texts speak from the past, four centuries long: this text speaks as a translation of a translational experience from one time to another. My translation speaks of our times.

Our times speak of books and authors “borne translated”. They speak, most often in English, sometimes in French, about the “lost and found in translation”. Salman Rushdie spoke about being “borne across the world” as a “translated man”; Julia Kristeva recently spoke in Paris about her experience of “translating herself” – meaning, her whole person – into French; Vladimir Nabokov, translator of Pushkin, and Nabokov translator of Nabokov, writes to his wife about a certain nostalgia for Russian while he is writing in English; Samuel Beckett translates Samuel Beckett, and makes friends with Valéry Larbaud; John Maxwell Coetzee is compelled to analyze Beckett’s English phrase... In every one of them lives a trans-

lator. Those are the translators that should provide a sur-vival to the texts, as those texts go living on. And it is not of a small importance that they choose a language seen as universal, in one way or the other, as a means of that sur-vival. Isaac Bashevis Singer did not live with the translator in himself, but instead, with many translatresses around himself. "There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia," but even this habitat, Derrida says, is "uninhabitable."<sup>1</sup> And yet, and yet (as Borges would have it), a story about translation in our days is so heavy a burden, that it is devouring us, and we even do not notice it at all, as we have to go on writing about translation, as it was the only thing left for us to do, to write about it, to analyse it, theorise it, or psychologise it, or sociologise it, do anything, in order to leave the painful practice of translation to the machines. Translation has entered the age of its technological reproducibility, it has lost its aura, and maybe paradoxically, as translation translates itself towards the centre of attention, it displaces towards the margin the figure of translator.

At the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, in the countries of Western Europe, anybody who went to school, learned Latin. It was only the end of a long process in which Latin – as well as education – gradually conquered the space of Western Europe. At the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> Century, neither Greek nor Latin were dead languages. Greek was, until the end of the Middle Ages, just another language, language of the Greeks from the Byzantine Empire. Going back in time, Greek was the language of culture in the whole Roman Empire. But, this simplified picture of the Middle Ages in Western Europe as purely Latin is seen in a distortion, and clearly visible only from a certain perspective: until recently, historians usually found it enough to say that, in the Middle Ages, priests and monks in Western Europe spoke Latin "by tradition". What does, then, the force with which Humanists rejected the scholastic Latin mean? Translation between Greek and Latin had its role as well in the cultivation of elegance of style as in the dissemination of the knowledge and information of thought and beliefs. Those are well known, but often forgotten facts.<sup>2</sup> Describing scholastic Latin as "barba-

1 Jacques Derrida, *Le monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris : Galilée, 1996).

2 To mention just a few among the most impressive historic studies published on this topic in recent years:

Jean-Christophe Saladin, *La Bataille du grec à la Renaissance* (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 2000). Saladin, researching the spectacular come-back of Greek language in the 15th Century: the enthusiasm of Humanists for this language, violent resistances to it by scholastic masters, Erasmus challenging Latin Vulgate in the

rous” and “degenerate”, Humanists actually rejected the unilingualism of Latin, aiming to deny plurality in and around itself, asking, as the matter of fact, translations in their plurality. A tool of knowledge for a long time, and the language of culture, from the beginning built on translation, towards the end of 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Latin became a petrified language, a greatest barrier forbidding the access to the sources: the two roles of Latin, closely intertwined, as language of science and language of religion, complicate the matter even further: during the sessions of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) a theological dispute took place over languages, original texts and vernacular translations, which brought to a paradoxical decision to establish translation (i.e., Vulgate) for an untouchable and untranslatable original. That is why resistance of Humanists in front of the *one language* is not a resistance to a tool, but a resistance to a certain discourse: that is why it was necessary to discard supposed transparency and communicability of *one* language, Latin (which (was) not actually one), in favour of multiplicity of languages and their translations. As Latin became a religious language (in etymological, and any other sense), its role as the language of universal communication in science became double: it was a language of relation and relationships – scientists used to write their letters to one another, as scientists and as friends, in Latin – and a language of restriction and excommunication – as the texts published in

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name of the Greek “truth”, the status of Greek and the status of Hebrew, and other topics, thus retraces two centuries of battle around Greek, until recently left as a “blind spot” in the history of Western civilisation.

Paul Veyne, *L'Empire gréco-romain* (Paris : Seuil, 2005). Veyne finds that a separation of chairs for Latin and Greek in French University had perpetuated the myth of an opposition between “Greece” and “Rome”, but that the so-called “Roman Empire” was actually Greco-Roman in more than one sense, to begin with the question of language: while the language practiced in the West was Latin, in Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, it was Greek.

Ernest Renan, *Histoire de l'étude de la langue grecque dans l'Occident de l'Europe depuis la fin du V<sup>e</sup> siècle jusqu'à celle du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle*, intr. et éd. par Perrine Simon-Nahum (Paris : Le Cerf, 2009). Written in 1848, and published for the first time more than a century and a half later, Renan's studies of medieval manuscripts create a particular vision of the period, following uninterrupted transmission of the Greek heritage in medieval philosophy and science, and its appropriations in the West before the Renaissance, thus aiming at a sort of historical and aesthetic reevaluation of the Middle Ages. The position of Renan with respect to the Greek rationalistic heritage is thus restituted, coupling with his ideas about Semitic roots of the cultural identity of the modern West. It is interesting to note that this study of a famous historian, a century and a half old, was published for the first time only after the studies by Jean-Christophe Saladin and Paul Veyne appeared.

Latin excluded readers without formal education. A sacralisation of Latin meant exclusion of translations as texts, *excommunication* of translation as process: it found itself threatened in its survival.

New technology had its role in this overturn of Latin. Books printed in vernaculars soon overwhelmingly outnumbered those printed in Latin. The idea of a new usage of language – and of a usage of new languages – came together with the idea of new science, and new school: a mother tongue as the best tool in transmitting knowledge was a radically new idea. Together with plurality of languages, a problem of translation became urgent.

Latin was, in those times, a living language, not spoken by any particular nation, but constantly in use by many people, and in various circumstances, particularly in philosophical and scientific communication. Jan Baptista van Helmont (1580–1644), Flemish alchemist, chemist, physiologist and physician, was educated at Louvain. He could not make up his mind as to which science to pursue professionally, and eventually chose to become a physician, but continued experimenting in other fields. Generally considered the father of pneumatic chemistry, he was the first to discover that there are gases distinct from atmospheric air, and even claimed that the word ‘gas’ was his own invention. Van Helmont’s mother’s tongue was Dutch, in which he wrote to the authorities of the Diocese of Mechelen, when they took him to trial because of his scientific writings published in Latin. In the Introduction to the posthumously published *Ortus medicinae*, it is written that Van Helmont considered mother tongue the best tool in science, as well as in the transfer of ideas: *Verum enim vero omnis primae cogitationis obiectum, in verba abiens, in vernacula prius semper haberi.*<sup>3</sup>

First ideas come to man in his mother tongue, and not in a foreign language, because it would be for him “animae inconveniens et mirum [inconvenient and strange for the soul]”: *Ortus medicinae, vel opera et opuscula omnia* (*Sunrise of Medicine, or Collected Works and Trifles*) was based on the material written Dutch as *Dageraad ofte Nieuwe Opkomst der Geneeskunst* (*Daybreak, or the New Rise of Medicine*), published in Rotterdam, in 1659. But, the majority of his texts he wrote in Latin. Should we say that he wrote those works “in a manner inconvenient and strange for the soul”? It may well be so, but Van Helmont combines an alchemist and a translator in himself, and this makes him an exemplary figure. In the In-

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3 That certainly every idea of first understanding, being changed into words, occurs always first in the mother tongue. Sietske Fransen, ‘Latin in a Time of Change: The Choice of Language as Signifier of a New Science?’, *Isis* 108, no. 3, September 2017, (pp. 629–635).

roduction to the German translation of the *Ortus medicinae*, his translator Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, a friend of Van Helmont's son, wrote that Van Helmont's intention really was to write in his mother tongue, but he desisted from the project because in that case, he would be compelled to invent too many new words and phrases to express new ideas.<sup>4</sup> It is a second-hand testimony, and should be regarded as such, but it shows translation as a wall (we should remember Benjamin here, and his: sentences are the wall in front of the original) which makes it difficult to scientific imagination to develop due to a surplus of linguistic imagination: as if, after many years spent in a monolingual, Latin school, this "language of teachers" became the only language of (scientific) imagination. But, this view is too simple. For Van Helmont, "inconvenient and strange" might have been not any particular language, but the process of *translation*.

But, translation is the first and necessary step in a free trade of ideas, in historiography known as *translatio studii*, the great transfer of knowledge from the Classical World to the European countries. Following classical authors, we can see translation as transfer of meaning, similar to the exchange of money: Cicero and Horace use the verb *reddere*, in the sense of textual translation. This word etymologically means to *give back, to repay*: to give back, or repay a text with a text in a *new* language, is an image in which translator uses words as money. For old notes and coins, he gives to his customer new ones. Or he pays with a piece of his body (*a pound of flesh*), as Jacques Derrida puts it in his vision of translator as a merchant of Venice, in a text that can be read as a big footnote that accompanies the philosopher's translation of several Shakespeare's lines: in this picture, we see translator as someone indebted to the reader for a *pound*: either in money, or in his own flesh.<sup>5</sup> It is enough to produce unease and discontent, and not only inconvenience and strangeness. Translator is, in this mercantile vision of translation, some sort of a language dealer who speculates with words (or gleans them, or borrows, or inherits), who grows the linguistic capital, and increases the value of linguistic assets, as the trade of ideas continues.

The example presented here is from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. In order to have a clear view on things, we should step back, to the last decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, and visit other stages, where translation moves to the focus, assuming the role of a midwife helping science bring forth its offspring.

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4 Sietske Fransen, p. 634.

5 Jacques Derrida, 'What is a relevant translation,' trans. by Lawrence Venuti, *Critical inquiry* 27, Winter 2001, pp. 174–200.

The introduction John Florio gave to his translation of *Essays* by Michel de Montaigne – a paradigmatic book when we speak about translation in this time – is “perhaps the most complex set of paratexts to precede an English Renaissance translation”, as a recent study states.<sup>6</sup> John or Giovanni Florio (1553–1625), was a son of Italian Huguenotes – converts from Catholic religion – exiled in England. The book was published in London, in 1603. Florio’s address “To the courteous Reader” tackles the unease produced in him by the act of a verbal “conversion”:

Shall I apologise translation? Why but some holde (as for their freehold) that such conversion is the subversion of Universities. God holde with them, and withhold them from impeach or empaire. It were an ill turne, the turning of Bookes should be the overturning of Libraries.<sup>7</sup>

Translation as *conversion*: changing, turning, altering, but also, transfiguration, transmutation; *conversion of goods into money*. Florio as a convert and converter. Universities and Libraries can be *subverted and overturned* because translations into vernaculars represent a threat to classical learning; moreover, there are religious reasons – conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, and the question of translating of the Bible was also a threat to the Scholasticism... Translation described as a “conversion” makes of the Florio’s “defense of translation” a challenge and manifesto, invoking “his old fellow Nolano” only three years after Bruno was sentenced by the Inquisition and burned alive in Rome as a heretic: “Yea but my olde fellow Nolano tolde me, and taught publikely, that from translation all Science had its of–spring”.<sup>8</sup>

The place where Bruno spoke of translation was Oxford, in 1583, as noted by a certain “N.W.” – who wrote to Samuel Daniel about his translation of *The Worthy Tract of Paulus Iouius* (1585):

You cannot forget that which *Nolanus* (that man of infinite titles among other phantasticall toyes) [t]ruely noted by chance in our Schooles, that by the helpe of translations, al Sciences had their offspring, and in my iudgement it

6 Neil Rhodes, ‘Status Anxiety and English Renaissance Translation’, in *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. by Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 107–120.

7 Peter G. Platt, ‘Monstruous Birth of Knowledge,’ in *Luoghi filosofici della mostruosità. Lo sguardo. Rivista di Filosofia* 9, 2012, II, p. 204.

8 Frances A. Yates, *John Florio: the Life of an Italian in Shakespeare’s England* (reprint, CUP Archive (1934), 2011), p. 89.

is true. The *Hebrewes* hatched knowledge, *Greece* did nourish it, *Italie* clothed and beautified it, & the artes which were left as wards in their minoritie to the people of Rome, by Translators as most carefull Gardiners, are now deduced to perfect age and ripenesses.<sup>9</sup>

*By the helpe of translations, al Sciences had their offspring*, he wrote, and that was what Bruno *taught publikely*. Translation is a midwife of science. And Florio describes his work on translation of Montaigne's *Essays* as painful labour. In the "Epistle Dedicatorie" dedicated to his benefactors, he explicitly says that his "last Birth" (probably a Dictionary published in 1598) was not as difficult as this one, which provoked "my fainting, my labouring, my lang[u]ishing, my gasping for some breath". This vision of translation as birth is followed by an image of translation as transgression, crime, even, that must be followed by a trial, and a verdict has to be given:

What doe the best then, but gleane after others harvest? borrow their colours, inherite their possessions? What doe they but translate? perhaps, vsurpe? at least, collect? if with acknowledgement, it is well; if by stealth, it is too bad: in this, our conscience is our accuser; posteritie our iudge: in that our studie is our advocate, and you Readers our iurie.<sup>10</sup>

Translator *gleans, borrows, inherits*, or even *usurps*: a poor relative, an unfortunate neighbour, a dissipate nephew...

On the subject of Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essays*, Theo Hermans states that the gap between the original and its translation is real, insidious and significant, and has ethical and ideological dimensions. It is not really a matter of rhetoric or style, of expressive means or idiolect. Rather, it is a matter of voice and value, of a speaking subject positioning itself in relation to, and at a critical distance from, even in direct opposition to the source text.

This gap, and this willful change of the "voice and value", leads him to the question what happens when translators, or interpreters for that matter, consciously exploit this gap.<sup>11</sup>

In *Cena delle ceneri* (1584), Giordano Bruno writes about his trip with Florio in a boat on Thames, reciting verses from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*: their friendship might have begun when Bruno gave his famous lectures

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9 Yates, p. 89; Platt, p. 205.

10 Platt, p. 205.

11 Theo Hermans, 'Shall I Appologize Translation' in *Journal of Translation Studies*, vol. 5, 2001 (pp. 1–9).

about Copernicus, and his own theories about infinite universe and multiplicity of worlds, in 1583.<sup>12</sup> In this dialogue, Bruno also writes a miniature comedy that has foreign languages as a theme:

TEO. *Intelligis, domine, quae diximus?* E gli dimanda, s'intendea la lingua inglese. Il Nolano rispose che no, e disse il vero.

FRU. ... facilmente mi persuaderei, che lui la intenda: ma per non togliere tutte l'occasioni che se gli porgono per la moltitudine de gl'incivili rincontri, e per posser meglio filosofare circa i costumi di quei, che gli si fanno innanzi, finga di non intendere.

PRU. *Surdorum alii natura, alii physico accidente*, alii rationali voluntate.

TEO. Questo non v'immaginate di lui! perchè, ben che sii a presso un anno, che ha praticato in questo paese, non intende più che due, o tre ordinarissime parole, le quali sa che sono salutazioni, ma non già particolarmente quel che vogliono dire: e di quelle, se lui ne volesse preferire una, non potrebbe.

SMI. Che vuol dire ch'ha sì poco pensiero d'intendere nostra lingua?

TEO. Non è cosa che lo costringa, o che l'inclini a questo, perchè coloro che son onorati e gentiluomini, con li quali lui suol conversare, tutti san parlare o latino, o francese, o spagnuolo, o italiano; i quali, sapendo che la lingua inglese non viene in uso, se non dentro quest'isola, si stimerebbono salvatici non sapendo altra lingua che la propria naturale.

SMI. Questo è vero per tutto, ch'è cosa indegna non solo ad un ben nato inglese, ma ancora di qual si voglia altra generazione, non saper parlare più che d'una lingua. Pure in Inghilterra, come son certo, che anco in Italia e Francia son molti gentiluomini di questa condizione, coi quali, chi non ha la lingua del paese, *non può conversare senza quella angoscia che sente un che si fa et a cui è fatto interpretare.*<sup>13</sup>

12 Yates, pp. 87–97.

13 Giordano Bruno, *Cena delle ceneri*, Dialogo terzo, *Dialoghi filosofici italiani*, ed. by Michele Ciliberto (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 2005), pp. 61–62.

THE. *Intelligis domine que diximms* [Do you understand, sir, what we Said]? And he asked [the Nolan] whether he understood the English language. The Nolan replied, no, and said the truth.

FRU. Better for him, because he would have understood more unpleasant and derogatory things than their opposite. It helps a great deal to be dirty by necessity, where the person would not like to be dirty by choice. I would, however, easily convince myself that he understands English, but in order that he should not be involved in all cases that present themselves through the numerous and impolite encounters, and so that he might reflect on the attitudes of those who come across him, he pretended not to understand English.

PRU. *Surdorum, ahi natura, afii physice accidente, alii rationali voluntate* [Some are deaf by nature, some by physical accident, some by deliberate intention].

THE. Do not suppose this of him, because although he has been around in this country almost a year, he does not understand more than two or three very ordi-



*The anxiety*<sup>14</sup> *one feels when translated and having translated to him...* This scene, intertwining three languages (English, Italian and Latin), represented in the text by only two (Italian and Latin), besides the questions regularly posed in relation to translation: who is translating? what languages are involved in the process? – puts an additional, but equally important: when? It adds the unease felt by the one who has to wait for translation in order to communicate: translation is slowing down of the process of communication. As it was written by Bruno, the scene of translation is already *translated*: the whole conversation, written in Italian, actually took place in English. It is a conversation about languages, about knowing *more* than one language; about uses and abuses of translation. The Nolan flatly refuses translation: he does not understand English, or feigns not to, as to give himself an opportunity to philosophise better about English customs; noble and honourable men, who's company he is used to, speak either Latin, or French, Spanish, or Italian; they realise English is spoken on this island only, and they would consider themselves savages if they knew no other language but their own; and finally: it is not worthy of a real Englishman, as well as of a member of any other nation, not to speak *more than one*

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nary words; those that are words of greeting, but not those that say something particular. And of these latter even if he wanted to utter one, he could not.

Smi. What does it mean that he had given so little thought to understanding our tongue?

THE. It is not something specific that forced and prompted him to this. For those who are distinguished and the gentlemen with whom he used to converse, all speak Latin, or French, or Spanish, or Italian: they, aware of the fact that English is used only within this island, deemed it disadvantageous not to know any other language except their own native tongue.

Smi. This is true of all; it is unworthy not only of a well-born Englishman but also of any other nationality not to know to speak more than one language; though in England (as I am sure also in Italy and France) there are many noblemen in this predicament, with whom anyone who does not have a command of the language of the country cannot converse without that anxiety which is felt by one who depends on an interpreter. Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, trans. by Stanley L. Jaki (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1975).

- 14 Theo Hermans notes: It seems to me that in this anxiety, this repressed knowledge, lies one of the enduring and intriguing paradoxes of translation. We would like to be able to take translation for granted, to see right through it, make it transparent, possess and dominate it. We know we cannot. Despite this knowledge we keep trying to annul the tendency of translation to leave traces of the translator's intervention and textual presence behind, so we may rest secure in the belief that the 'pure' translation's close fit between itself and its original leaves no room for the translator's separate agenda. Hermans, p. 7.

*language*. Moreover, the Nolan speaks about unease in the situation when a translator is needed to enable communication. The scene tells us: plurilingualism is enabling communication; translator makes it “uneasy”. But, isn’t the knowledge of several languages already some kind of translation? Reading this scene, we *cannot forget that which Nolanus ... truly noted*, and various written testimonies repeat: *by the help of translations, all Sciences had their offspring*. It was such a novelty in those years that his words were transmitted from text to text.

In England, as Frances Yates notes, “Bruno feels himself to be a cultured exile in a semi-barbarous island... this has been for generations a conventional attitude of Italian exiles in England”.<sup>15</sup> As Bruno points out in *Cena*, “the word foreigner is in their language a bitter insult, and is coupled with the terms ‘dog’ and ‘traitor’”.<sup>16</sup>

France was a place of a beginning, or begetting: in Paris, in 1582, a place becoming *the* centre of European culture, Bruno published in Italian his comedy *Candlebearer*, which may be read as a sort of a translation of the Nolan philosophy into the literary expression. At the same time, and in the same place, he published his satirical dialog *Cantus Circeus*, written in Latin. Bruno speaks philosophically to the public outside the Academia, in order to communicate with the intellectual public opposed to the academic one, Latin and Scholastic. Is the comedy written in Italian, *the* language of European arts and culture in that time, a refusal of translation, or inviting of translations? Is the satire written in Latin an untimely gesture, untimely invitation of translations? It led to none, at the time. Afterwards, Bruno publishes philosophical disputes in Italian, and in England, staying always linguistically ambiguous with regard to translation, between refusal and invitation. Bruno’s universal and universalistic mission is an open invitation to universal translation, multiplying offspring of science from language to language, from university to university, from book to book. Upon his arrival back to Paris from London, Bruno decided to translate into Latin a dissertation written by Italian mathematician Fabrizio Mordente, who invented of a particular kind of compass. Science followed parallel courses in different languages. Mordente had already published his tract on compass, in Italian, several times: in Venice in 1567; in Vienna in 1572, in Prague in 1578, in Antwerp in 1584. Bruno as a translator “has his own agenda”, in Theo Hermans’ words<sup>17</sup>, but I would rather say that, as translator, he is

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15 Yates, p. 97.

16 Yates, p. 95.

17 Hermans, p. 3.

asking for a space of his own. He translated Mordente's ideas on compass in order to refute Aristotle's hypothesis on the incommensurability of infinitesimals, thus confirming the existence of the "minimum" which was the basis of his atomic theory. Bruno's translation brought a conflict between the author and the translator, as he was "consciously exploiting the gap" between the original and its translation, and in this case, we are actually dealing with "ethical and ideological dimensions" of translation, with "the matter of voice and value", and certainly, "of a speaking subject positioning itself in relation to, and at a critical distance from, even in direct opposition to the source text." It is true that the translator in this case was not a man easy to communicate with, but the author felt obliged to denounce him to the ecclesiastic authorities: he was, as you can imagine, discontent with the translation. It is true that translation provokes anxiety, but in the form of this very anxiety it is giving time and space for science to give birth (in labour, as described by Florio) to its offspring.