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Against Translation

The Struggle Over Translation for the Stage in the (Late) Dutch Golden Age

By Marco Prandoni (Università di Bologna, Italy)

Abstract & Keywords

English:

In the multilingual society of the Republic of the United Provinces of the early modern period, translation was an extremely widespread social practice. At the Amsterdam Theatre as well (Amsterdamse Schouwburg, founded in 1637), the repertoire consisted in a great deal of translations and adaptations of foreign plays, both classic and contemporary. Much new light has been shed recently on theatre repertoires and the agents involved in them, including the intermediaries. In this paper I focus on a debate for and against translation for the stage which broke out between ca. 1665 and 1680, as well as on the cultural and social implications of this struggle in which translation was foregrounded.

Keywords: Republic of the United Provinces, Dutch Golden Age, Amsterdam Schouwburg, Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes, French classicism, early modern drama, discourse on translation, multilingualism, poetics of translation, stage translation, retranslation

Introduction

During the seventeenth century, the Republic of the United Provinces witnessed a growing process of codification and standardization of the (proto-)national language, civilized Dutch. At the same time, many other languages were widely used in the daily life of most of its inhabitants and especially among immigrants. The latter often identified themselves, in different contexts, with their own neighborhood, with their city, with the state-community of the Republic and with a cross-border linguistic community (Burke 2004: 5-7). Particularly in the big trading cities in the province of Holland people were accustomed to a high degree of practical multilingualism, as Willem Frijhoff (2017) puts it. Dutch, with its many varieties, coexisted with German, English, Italian (which enjoyed considerable cultural prestige among the élite), Latin, spoken and written for religious and academic purposes by a small élite of men, and of course French. French had always been an important language in the history of the Low Countries and its role was greatly strengthened by the mass of Calvinist immigrants from France, French-speaking Wallonia and Flanders: all of them were called Walloons, and the Flemish were also generally fluent in French, often becoming French language teachers. French slowly but surely overshadowed Latin as international lingua franca in the second half of the century (Burke 2004: 43-60; Frijhoff 2017: 128).

Given this situation of practical multilingualism, language contact and intense intercultural negotiation, it is hardly surprising that translation – both oral and written, both spontaneous and highly codified – was an omnipresent social practice: among merchants, jurists and notaries, at the highly Francophile court in The Hague, and of course among scholars and writers, the Republic being a world staple market not only of goods but also of books in many languages.

Theatre was no exception. Dutch theatre had been very much influenced by French models since the late Middle Ages, in the Chambers of Rhetoric (see Prandoni 2014a). The ‘modern’ humanistic theatre, which considered the classics as models, also passed through French, and neo-Latin, mediation. During the seventeenth century in Amsterdam one might find on the one hand playwrights such as Joost van den Vondel – firstly imbued with protestant French culture due to his immigrant Anabaptist milieu, then slowly shifting to classical Latin and Greek models (see Grootes & Schenkeveld-van der Dussen 2009: 212-219). On the other hand, dramatists like Theodore Rodenburgh mediated to the Dutch audience highly successful Spanish, French and in some cases English plays too, showpieces with romantic or adventurous plots full of action, passions, murder. Both the plays which were rooted in the humanist tradition and those which were not, or more loosely, were often translations/adaptations of foreign texts. In some cases, they were ‘exported’ again outside the Republic, to the cities in northern Germany and Scandinavia where Dutch was frequently used as a lingua franca and Dutch companies performed in their own mother tongue (Grit 1994). The Republic functioned thus as a staple market with regard to drama as well.

Recent research focusing on translated theatre production and its agents and intermediaries (Rodríguez Pérez 2016) has shown that ‘original’ Dutch plays were neither the most prevalent nor the most popular (Jautze, Álvarez Francés & Blom 2016: 15-16). The perception of canonic Dutch-writing authors as dominating the dramatic arena was biased by a persistent Romantic paradigm focused on national cultural products. However, not everybody was enthusiastic about translation playing such a vital role on the stage. Some dramatists, and among them one of the most successful, Jan Vos, took an outspoken position against translated plays and translation: a largely unknown Dutch contribution to the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. In the present paper I will briefly outline the cultural and social context in which the discourse on translation developed, and how it was used by playwrights to legitimize themselves and their work as well as gain influence in the theatrical life of the young Republic in the second half of the seventeenth century. I am not primarily concerned with theoretical issues of translation studies but with an interesting case of translation as a topic for debate within the United Provinces in the early-modern period; a society which lay at the crossroads of different cultures and in which translation practices, and reflection on translation, deeply influenced its cultural dynamics.

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Joost van den Vondel and Jan Vos

Paratexts are the place where 'les idées du théâtre' – to quote a running project on the luminaria in French, Italian and Spanish plays of the early modern time (IdT: **http://www.idt.paris-sorbonne.fr/**) – are mostly packaged. Views on translation happen to be often foregrounded in introductions and dedicatory letters as well. Theo Hermans (1996) has collected a number of Dutch reflections on translation published during the early modern period. However, his stimulating book pays little attention to theatre, a central social practice in the Republic and most notably in Amsterdam, where plays were usually printed by the official printing house of the Schouwburg and by many others – including pirate publishers. The booklets were spread among audiences after the performance and in some cases even before. Moreover, Hermans selects two 'canonical' voices of dramatists, G.A. Bredero and Joost van den Vondel: the latter was admittedly the most influential poet of the century, and his reflections on translation were pivotal, but his humanistic-classical orientation was only shared by a fraction of the innumerable dramatists who wrote for the stage. Bredero was not a *poeta doctus* but he greatly admired the classical culture and the cultivated elite of his time, as we can read in the preface to his adaptation of Terentius' *Eunuchus*, *Moortje* (*The Moorish Girl*, 1617), humbly offered to the classical scholars ('Latynsche-geleerde', 'Latinists', see Hermans 1996: 90, Jansen 2011: 200ff).

Vondel's reflection on translation, nourished by a life-long engagement with it, is in many respects extraordinary (Hermans 1996: 111), but not with regard to his view on the necessity for writers to engage in the study of venerated models by means of translation: a necessary exercise in derivative-imitative writing (Hermans 1985). Beside the paratexts of his plays, in a short treatise (*Aenleidinge ter Nederduitsche dichtkunste*, *Introduction to Dutch Poetry*, 1650) Vondel states that 'translating the illustrious Poets will help the aspiring Poet in the same way the Painter's apprentice may benefit from copying great masterpieces' ['het overzetten uit vermaerde Poëten helpt den aenkomende Poeet, gelijck het kopieeren van kunstige meesterstucken den Schildersleerling']: an 'artful theft' ['behendig stelende'], as he adds with a wink toward the reader. The condition is thus, unsurprisingly: 'Knowledge of foreign languages is a great advantage' ['Kennis van uytheemsche spraecken vordert niet weinigh'] (translation M. Kasten, in Kasten 2012: 255). Vondel knew this from his own experience. A son of Antwerp immigrants, and despite belonging to the middle-class (like his parents, he traded in silk goods), his social background was not that of the elite of merchants-regents to which he would try to open his way throughout his life. His mother taught him Dutch, and even that not perfectly, as he once wrote in the humorous introduction to a translation from Du Bartas (Vondel 1927-1940, vol. 2: 230). He attended the French school but not the Latin one nor university and it was only through restless lifelong, self-taught learning that he could learn good Latin, decent Greek, a little bit of Italian besides, probably, some German and English. Nothing in comparison to such celebrated linguists as Constantijn Huygens, fluent in so many dead and living tongues (Joby 2014). Knowledge of foreign languages is thus considered by Vondel to be essential for the intellectual and artistic development of a poet.

Jan Vos knew him well. Since 1640 was Vondel also a convert to Catholicism, Vos' own confession. Vos helped him stage many of his plays, as a trustee of the Amsterdam theatre who devised ballets and *tableaux vivants* for the performances. However, despite his respect for Vondel, his ideas on drama were utterly different. 'Seeing before saying' was his motto and the few plays he wrote were anything but static: lofty, full of action, murder and passions. He had a tremendous success at the Schouwburg but also among the elite of *literati* who appreciated his talent and his 'moralistic' treatment of passions (Geerdink 2014: 46), as in the best Senecan tradition, which spread all over Europe between 16th and 17th century. Most of his career as a playwright – besides being an occasional poet for different *milieus* in Amsterdam and a professional glassmaker – was built upon the success of *Aran and Titus* from 1641 onwards. That tragedy greatly influenced the taste of both public and authors in the following thirty years, the time when he served as trustee of the theatre of Amsterdam. It was also thanks to his impulse that the theatre was partially rebuilt, in order to welcome plays *all'italiana*, from Italy, France and Spain (Amir 1996).

It was precisely for the opening of the new theatre in 1665 that Vos had intended his play *Medea*, but due to technical problems its premiere was postponed for a couple of years. It proved immensely popular. The printed text of the play contains an interesting defense of his own poetics from vocal critics and a plea for creativity, individual talent and experience, against excessive codification, foreign models and against translation as well.

Vos immediately gets to the point:

> De wijze Grieken, hooghdraavende Romeinen, schrandere Italiaanen, geestige Spanjaarts, aartige Fransen en loffelijke Neederlanders, hebben hun krachten saamen gespannen, om Medea voor alle keurige oogen en ooren, in hun Schouwburgen, op het Toneel te brengen; ik van Natuur, mijn eenige schoolmeesteres in de Duitsche Dichtkunst, na het veurbeeldt der beroemste Dichters, aangeprikkelt, zal u de zelfde Medea aan d'Amstel doen zien hoe dat zy zich binnen Korinten heft gedraagen. Zoo uw ooren geen vloeiende vaarzen. Vol dreunende woorden, gelijk zulk een groote Prinses vereischen, ontmoeten, uw oogen zullen aan haar kleedt, daar zy zich in vertoont, mijns weetens, noch stof van uit- noch inheemsche Dichters vinden. (Vos 1667/1975: 352)
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> [Wise Greeks, lofty Romans, smart Italians, witty Spaniards, gentle French and praiseful Dutch have joined their forces together to put Medea on their stages for all honorable eyes and ears. I, stimulated by nature – my one and only schoolteacher in Dutch poetry – following the example of the most famous poets, will show you here on the river Amstel how she behaved in Corinth. Should your ears not meet the fluent verses, full of bombastic words, that such a great princess deserves, your eyes will not find in her costume any cloth borrowed from foreign or local poets.]

Vos could scarcely have chosen a more cherished subject-matter in theatre and literature than Medea. To name just two recent and influential versions of this evergreen myth, Seneca's *Medea* had just been translated by Jacob Kemp in 1665; a French travelling company had put on the Amsterdam stage Corneille's *La toison d'or* in 1662, dealing with the antecedents of the same story, a spectacular play which seduced Vos himself and the audience (Buitendijk 1975: 326-329). That is why his initial statement emerges with the force of a provocation: despite the overflow of classic and contemporary, Dutch and international treatments of the subject, he has not borrowed anything from anyone. He makes use of the metaphor of the text as a 'dress/costume', already used for instance by Bredero and Vondel, and any borrowings from others as patches on it. The reader will not find them in his Medea, because he has only relied on his own 'nature'. What follows is a lively discussion of the classicist theory on theatre, based on the poetics of Horace and Aristotle and on their modern interpreters. No wonder that Vos quotes Horace in the Dutch translation by Joost van den Vondel, as he intends to distance himself –

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implicitly – from the growing 'orthodoxy' of his fellow-playwright's adhesion to classical regulation, as expressed in the foreword to *Jephta* in 1657 (Porteman & Smits-Veldt 2008: 538). Vos does not reject those regulations as such, but tests each abstract rule to the theatrical practice, in the Netherlands and elsewhere. He refuses authority as an argument, and all the more so if that authority is drawn from a poet and a philosopher – Horace and Aristotle – who between them did not write a single line for the stage.

Vos' implications are far-reaching. For the purpose of this article I will just single out what concerns the discourse on translation and national culture:

> Hier zal ik voorzeeker bestormt worden van een deel lieden, de wijze uitgezondert, die het hooft door de roeden en plakken, zoo vol Latijn zyn geslaagen, dat'er geen plaats in kan vinden: my dunckt ik hoor ze alree zeggen: *wat mach deeze Vos rammelen en raazen van d'eigenschappen der Spelen? van het verdeelen der leeden in gedichten? wat men doen en laaten moet? het zou best zijn d thy zich met zijn ambacht, daar de huiszorg in bestaat, bemoeide; hy heeft niet dan Duits geleert: laat ons van de kunsten der aaloude Dichters spreken: wy hebben op Parnas, by Apollo, school geleegen, en Letters gegeten.* Dat ik niet dan de Duitsche taal ken, en noch zo goedt niet gelijk ik wensch, wil ik gaaren bekennen: maar lichtelijk beter dan eenige die zich door op hun schoollatijn veel laten voorstaan. (Vos 1667/1975: 362-363)

> [Here I will doubtless be assaulted by a mass of people – but not the wise among them: their head is so full of Latin, with which they were beaten in schools, that there remains no space left. I mean I can hear them say already: *how can this Vos rant and rage about the features of a play? of the internal division of poems? about what you can or cannot do? it would be better if he devoted himself to his profession, on which his household depends; he hasn't learnt anything but Dutch – let us speak about the ancient poets: we went to school and ate letters in Parnassus, with Apollo.* That I can only speak Dutch, and not as good as I wish, I candidly admit, but slightly better than some of those who are proud of their school-Latin.]

He then goes on to quote P.C. Hooft, a highly respected historian, scholar and playwright, as well as a politician. Hooft once reminded him that Spiegel 'who helped to construct the Dutch language and poetry', ['die de Neederduitsche taal en Dichtkunst heft helpen bouwen'] did not consider poetry to sprout 'from foreign languages, but from innate talent' ['niet uit vreemde taalen, maar uit een aangebooren aart'] (Vos 1667/1975: 362-363). Vos relies thus on prestigious 'national' scholars who, despite their erudition and international orientation, were between 16th and early 17th century highly concerned with the cultivation of the vernacular language in order to render it able to compete with the other modern vernaculars (see Burke 2004: 61-88; Prandoni 2014a). But Vos goes further, expanding on this:

> De taalkunde maakt wel geleert, maar geen Dichters: ik wil wel bekennen dat het een brug is daar men over moet gaan als men een ander zijn wieigejsheidt wil ontleenen, om die voor zijn eigen uit te geeven [...]De Dichtkunst is geen dochter van uitheemsche taalen; maar van d'overvloedt der geesten, die zich in de gedachten uitstorten [...]. (Vos 1667/1975: 363-364)

> [The knowledge of languages makes one cultivated, not a poet. I am disposed to admit that it is a bridge which you have to cross if you want to borrow wisdom from someone else, and pass it off as your own [...] Wisdom is not a child of foreign languages, but of the overflow of the spirits that pour out in thoughts [...]]

Although he praises the role of polyglots and translators as cross-cultural mediators, using the metaphor of the bridge – to which we are accustomed since the very outset of contemporary translation studies (Holmes 1972) – Vos strongly opposes the idea that knowing many foreign languages and possessing a great scholarly erudition is a necessary precondition to becoming a poet.

His argumentation is obviously not just limited to poetics and reveals a social component. The social element emerges from that imaginary criticism: why should a glassmaker write on such subjects? He would do better devote himself to the profession his family depends on. Vos is aware that he does not belong to the upper classes of merchants-regents and intellectuals. His simple Dutch education is a direct consequence of that social background, resulting in no classical education, no university, no educational trips abroad (the *grand tour*), no intercourse with the international Republic of Letters. He is and will remain primarily a craftsman making a living out of his manual work, a condition which he proudly embraces and defends, and a talented poet, often for the élite as well, for which he often wrote (see Geerdink 2012). But it was primarily of the stage that he could claim a lifelong experience as a playwright and as a trustee of the Schouwburg. Not a *poeta doctus* as in the illustrious humanistic traditions embraced by Vondel and – as he implies – by many other less gifted colleagues who have no idea of what good poetry and theatre are and are not respectful of their own mother tongue either. Vos is here also expanding on the words of a famous 'popular' poet of the beginning of the century, the already quoted G.A. Bredero, a 'simple man of Amsterdam' who in the dedicatory letter to the Latinists of his modern adaptation of Terentius' *Eunuchus, Moortje* [*The Moorish Girl*] (1617) cautiously suggested that knowledge of too many languages, prior to a good knowledge of your own mother tongue, can result in insufficient mastery of the latter. Bredero also invited learned scholars to be generous with less cultivated people, whose lack of knowledge he directly linked to ignorance of foreign languages, with a curious compound word: 'uytheemsche-letterloosen-ongheleerde' ['uneducated and with no knowledge of foreign languages and literatures'], Hermans 1996, 90; Jansen 2011: 202). The subtle, indirect critic expressed by Bredero to the exponents of the social and cultural elite at the beginning of the century is turned here into open attack: the social gap between cultivated elite and lower middle-class had apparently spread in those fifty years.

Concerning the translation-imitation of the ancients, somewhat anticipating the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* which would break out in France and elsewhere some decades later (Buitendijk 1975: 352), Jan Vos defends the primacy of the modern times – and most notably the Dutch impulse to modernity therein: after the invention of the compass, the new war techniques, the telescope, the press, shall we refuse all that only because the ancients did not know them? The latent national, not to say nationalist, undertone of this argumentation comes to the fore when he evokes the Dutch glory, admiral Michiel de Ruyter. During the recent wars against England, De Ruyter did not shine because he had learnt warfare or courage from ancient Hamilcar or Atilius Regulus. His braveness was the result of 'nature' and 'experience', as in the case of the true poet, like Vos himself.

Lodewijk Meijer and Thomas Asselijn

Although Vos also points out that Aristotle lost much of his authority to Descartes, it is doubtful whether he was particularly versed in philosophy. But this was most certainly the case with Lodewijk Meijer who to this day

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enjoys a reputation as linguist and philosopher. A friend, an interpreter and an editor of Baruch de Spinoza and exponent of what Israel (2001: 197) has called the radical enlightenment in the Republic, sprouting from the libertine circles of the Latin schoolteacher Franciscus van den Enden (Bossers 2012), Meijer tried to combine rationalism with Christianity in the first 'of the great public intellectual controversies generated by the rise of radical thought' (Israel 2001: 197) in 1666. He also helped form a scientific terminology for Dutch, editing the new edition of a dictionary which was aimed at elucidating foreign terms for those who did not master foreign languages (Israel 2001: 197). At the same time, he did not miss first-hand experience of theatre either. He composed plays, drawing on classic, Spanish and more notably French models, Corneille in the very first place of whom he proved to be a true disciple. Since the 50s he collaborated with the Schouwburg from a peripheral position (Jautze, Álvarez Francés and Blom 2016: 28) but later on he became directly involved with it when he entered the body of its directors (together with Vos) in 1665. At the time, the two colleagues shared a passion for sensational baroque drama, intricate plots, for all sorts of machinery and visual effects and thus inevitably – no matter what Vos wrote in his preface – for Corneille.

Shortly after *Medea*, and the death of its author Jan Vos, Meijer put his own version of the antecedents of that storyline on stage (once again!): *Ghulde Vlies* [*The Golden Fleece*], an adaptation of Corneille's *La toison d'or*. Meant as a tribute to his venerated model, admired in Amsterdam few years later, it was composed in 1664. In the preface, Meijer adopts a skeptical stance towards the classic rules which is quite similar to Vos': hostile to servile imitation, he maintains that not all classic rules have to be respected and defends the Dutch dramatic tradition which proved to be different, but equally successful. Six months later, in 1668, we hear an utterly different sound in the long preface to his *Verloofde Koninghsbruidt* [*The Engaged King's Daughter*], not a translation proper but mainly drawn on Corneille and Seneca. The author tells the long prehistory of this play, begun in 1654 and reshaped again and again, rejected as inaugural pièce of the new theatre in 1665 and eventually put on stage and published after a deep revision (Meijer 1668/1978: 60). All these elements indicate a complete reorientation of the playwright with respect to the classic dramatic rules. The preface becomes a literary-theoretical treatise on dramatic poetics and follows in this Corneille's *Discours sur le poème dramatique* (placed as introductory texts to his *Complete Works* in 1660). Corneille is considered normative and his views on theatre shared and propagated among the Dutch public, together with Horace's and Aristotle's. Corneille, and Seneca, have been his 'Northern stars in this sea' ['noordt-sterren in deze zee'] (Meijer 1668/1978: 64): without them he would not have dared to write for the stage.

Meijer's reorientation reveals that something is stirring in the world of the Amsterdam theatre, an evolution to which Vos' *Medea* certainly contributed, with its polemic stance and overwhelming public success to confirm it. Vos' death opened a struggle among supporters and rivals of his views, all of them contending a leading position in the Amsterdam theatre.

This conflict was fought on stage and in printed paratexts in which authors explained and legitimized their position, setting out against competing views. In the same year 1668 a new play was put on stage, by Thomas Asselijn: *Rise and Fall of Mas Anjello, or the Neapolitan Turmoils, Happened in the Year 1647* [*Op en ondergang van Mas Anjello, of Napelse beroerte, voorgevallen in 't jaar 1647*]. In the printed drama text, accompanied by a dedicatory letter to a secretary of the city council and son of a burgomaster, the author defends himself and his work on political as well as on aesthetic grounds. To start from the latter, he makes a plea against translation / adaptation of foreign plays and, more generally, against imitative poetics:

> Ik offer hem U.E.A. dan gants armelijk en veragt, doch in een vry kleet van geen Spanjaardt noch Fransman ontleent, noch omswachtelt met Poëetsche droomen, maar alleen naar de waarheyt der zaaken. Wy hebben hier door een spoor trachten te maaken voor onze kunst-genooten, want willen wy dat onze vaarzen geroemdt zullen worden en onze Schouwburg doorlugtigh werdt, laat ons dan niet sweeten om door 't overzetten van uytheemse Toneelspeelen beroemdt te werden […]
>
> Door copieeren en kunt gy niet opklimmen om vermaardt te warden, alzoo het zelve zoo veel herssens noch begrijp niet van nooden heft. Laat ons dan tragten eygen vindinge voort te brengen en toegang neemen tot de Historien en op alle voorvallen onze bedenkingen laaten gaan. Wat zou ons verhindren dat wy niet zoo wel als de Spaanse, Franse en Engelse zouden kunnen voortbrengen zoodanige gedachten gelijk ons dagelijks van haar op onze Schouburgh warden vertoont? (Asselijn 1668/1994: 22).
>
> [I offer him [Masaniello] to you utterly poor and despised, but a free costume, not borrowed from any Spaniard or Frenchman, nor bandaged by poetic dreams but based exclusively on truth. By doing this we have tried to make a trail for our fellow-artists, for if we want our verses and our theatre to gain fame, then let us not sweat to become famous by translating foreign plays […]. By copying it is not possible to climb up to fame, as this does not require much brains or intelligence. Therefore, let us try to bring forth our own inventions and turn to Histories, leaving all doubts behind. What could prevent us from bringing forth, like Spaniards, French and English do, similar thoughts to the ones which are shown every day in our Theatre?]

Painters do not learn from copying from other painters, but *dal vero*: Vondel's aesthetic views find here a counterpart, and his arguments are refuted. Jan Vos is not mentioned but receives a complete backing. However, Asselijn radicalizes the views of his predecessor, abandoning classical or romanesque intrigues and choosing 'Histories': the dramatization of truly happened events from (almost contemporary, as the indication of the year 1647 in the subtitle stresses) history. Asselijn's choice of Masaniello was very daring indeed: the preface shows that he had to defend himself from attacks not only to his poetic views but because of his choice of subject-matter: a fiscal revolt. He has to explain that no sympathy whatsoever can be felt for the Neapolitan fisher and that any polemical allusion in the play to an exaggerated taxation in the Republic (a hot item at the time) is out of the question.

Contemporary history entered the Schouwburg only as an exception, and certainly not in dealing with the lower social classes. Revolts were (rarely) shown only as cautionary tales for the audience, as in the case of the Anabaptist upheavals in Munster and Amsterdam, suffocated in blood by exemplary city magistrates (see Prandoni 2014b): those plays had an overt ideological message against any form of radicalism which might have destabilized the social order. Theatre directors, in close touch with the city magistrates, kept a close eye on the repertoire (Porteman and Smits-Veldt 2008: 544). Anything that might lead to social unrest was carefully avoided, in a society without a central court or an absolute monarch and in which everything was based on a delicated balance between different forces and interests. It is incorrect to say, as some contemporary and modern interpreters have (see Meijer Drees 1989), that Masaniello's social transgression finds some justification in the

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play. That would be an *unicum* in pre-romantic Europe. However, Masaniello is given a more complex character than, for instance, the English or German versions (on which see Masaniello 1998, with an Italian translation of the Dutch play by A. Peters) and gets a chance to express his radical views in long and passionate monologues, before becoming completely frenzied. Asselijn liked to put round characters on stage that fully contrasted with each other, however shocking or radical their arguments might be: a full-blood theatre-maker with a taste for provocation.

In any case, Masaniello and its author came in for a lot of criticism. In that criticism aesthetic and social arguments were interwoven, and the author's refusal to draw inspiration from foreign models was put down to ignorance, not considered a deliberate choice. The bookbinder Asselijn had migrated with his family in the 20s from France: he belonged to the (lower)-middleclass theatre-practitioners (he would go bankrupt in 1678) and, much as Vos and others, did not belong to the wealthy upper class, the internationally-oriented intellectual elite of Meijer and his circles.

Academy Nil Volentibus Arduum vs. the Schouwburg directors: a pamphlet war on translation

In this period an international orientation meant above all a French orientation. French was taking over from Latin as the international lingua franca. In the Republic it became extremely popular in the upper levels of society, becoming sometimes a posh affectation (Frijhoff 2017: 128, 138). Meijer's 'conversion' to French orthodoxy (he even had to disavow his beloved special effects on stage) went together with a new French orientation among academic poets and playwrights who stuck to the *règles de l'art* of the *doctrine classique*, even before Boileau would systematize it. This led to an escalation in the struggle between practice-oriented playwrights, backed by the majority of the Schouwburg directors, and academic writers.

Academic is intended here in a two senses. Academics mostly had a first-class university education: Meijer, a Cartesian philosopher, held a Phd in philosophy and in medicine from Leiden (Israel 2001: 197; Holzhey 2014: 81). In 1669 Meijer, after stepping down from the board of trustees of the theatre because he was in conflict with his colleagues, founded with other friends the first Dutch Academy on the French and Italian model: a scholarly and literary association whose members gathered once a week to discuss rhetoric, poetry, and theatre (their conferences would be published only in 1765: NVA 1765/1989). Their aim was to become as authoritative a body as the French Académie Française, laying down rules for the codification of art, and above all theatre, according to the French-classicist model which they considered normative (see Holzhey 2014). Needless to say, they intended to defy the 'party' of theatre directors and practitioners and overrule them in theatre policy and, practically, in the direction of the Schouwburg. Their opponents were those playwrights who were close to theatre direction and mostly relied on practice, experience and audience success and refused to accept strict abstract regulations.

From 1669 onwards, and at least until 1681, the arguments would rage (see Meijer 1978: 49-59; Meijer Drees 1989: 121-143; Holzhey 2014). Nil members reissued five amended translations by their adversaries (Holzhey speaks of 'tegenvertalingen', 'countertranslations', 2014: 220), like Hendrik de Graeff's *Agrippa* (from Philippe Quinault) and Blasius' rendering of Plautus' *Menaechmi*. They followed a much more regulated structure and language, in order to meet the rules of French classicism with regard to consistency, stylistic appropriateness, clarity, soberness. The Schouwburg poets reacted to this act of war by anonymously editing an edition of their own translation of Jean de Rotrou's *Greek Antigone*, accompanied by a self-defense and a counterattack in the fore- and afterword, directed *against literary researchers*. They address 'poetry lovers' as follows:

> Waerde Kunstgenooten, en mede begunstigers der Dichtkunst, wy beleeven een tijdt, dat al 't gene ter liefde, en uyt zucht tot de Poëzy werdt aan den dach gebracht, behoorde niet als gewapent in zijn volle rusting te voorschijn te koomen, om alzoo de vervolgers, te weeren, en te doen afstuyten. Te meer, alzoo eenige, by afzonderinge, onder den anderen hebben opgerecht, (gelijk zy 't noemen) een Reedenschool, al seen Poëtische Inquizitie, ofte een slaafachtige onderzoeking der Kunst; waar by alles, (wat niet met den Kanon, ofte reegel van dat Concilium over een komt), werdt verkettert, ende verworpen, als onwaardigh tot eenigh nut (*Bericht aan alle Beminnaars van de Poëzy*, Griekse Antigóne 1670: A 2).
>
> [Esteemed fellow-artists, and fellow-supporters of Poetry, we live in a time in which all is brought forth out of love and poetic aspiration, must appear armed in full armor, in order to defend itself from its persecutors and make them recoil. Even more so because some of the others have founded an Academy (as they name it), which should actually bear the righteous name of Poetic Inquisition, or servile study of Art; in which everything – whatever does not meet the Canon, or rule of that Council – is banned and rejected as completely unworthy and useless.]

Meijer's plays are clumsy and lack theatricality, because of their exaggerated imitative nature. The tone is openly sarcastic: twelve years of dedicated study have resulted in a play, *The Engaged King's Daughter*, which is just 'a bunch of French patches all thrown together' ['van een party Franse lappen [...] te zamen geflikt']. No wonder the play met with little success among audiences and was immediately removed from the repertoire of the Schouwburg, which would be utterly ruined ['een totale ruine der Schouwburg'] (A 3) if the Academy managed to get its hands on it. The authors wonder if the fact that those men have studied, 'are expert in numerous foreign languages and sciences" ['ervaaren in veeldenhande taalen en weetenschappen'] and 'have their names adorned with special titles' ['wiens naamen met bezondere tijtelen zijn verrijkt'] could be a good reason to choose their side: not at all, is their answer, as they know many examples of people who were driven to frenzy by study ('door de studien': A 3).

In the afterword to the *Greek Antigone*, they blame Nil's publication of already existing and staged versions in a new, corrected form. The academicians had re-issued an amended translation by Joan Blasius from Jean de Magnon, adding their own *Critica* (NVA 1670) and attacking 'the author of the translated Orondaates en Statira, shown in the theatre' ['Autheur van de vertaalde Orondates en Statira'] (D 1). They had listed an interminable list of errors concerning 'construction' of the plot ['constructie'], morphology, syntax (word order: instead of 'u vrientschap ik versmaade' they prefer 'ik versmaade uw vrientschap' etc., D 1). This must have been painful for Blasius and the circles of the Schouwburg. In their reply, Asselijn & Co. retorted the same accusations. Even though they did not share the academicians' views on regulated language and rationalist language use, they could sum up many places in Meijer's *The Engaged King's Daughter* where, despite twelve years of polishing, the language sounded far-fetched, obscure or inappropriate. In the conclusion, they subscribed to what Meijer in his

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modesty had written in his preface: ‘and if there is anything good in it, then it belongs to the Frenchman’ [‘en zoo ’er al iet goets in is, zoo is het van de Fransman, gelijk hy zelfs zeyt’] (D 2).

The academy as a collective body, and Meijer on his own, launched a furious campaign against their opponents, Asselijn in the first place, as they did not doubt that he stood behind the anonymous work. Sarcasm is paid back with the same coin: they would reproach Asselijn for using too pompous a language for simple fishers in his *Mas Anjello*, and suggest he follow the ancient models of Plautus and Terentius,

> ten waar wy wisten, dat die Heer, uit de Natuur met een algemeene wetenschap begaaft, een byzondere afkeer had van alle uitheemsche spraaken, en geleerdtheid daar uit gehaalt […] Wy zijn dan ook niet verwondert, dat die heer geduurig roept om eige vindingen, wijl hy niet meer, als zijn Moeders taal, kennende, en de andere, na ’t loffelijke voorbeeldt van Jan Vos, verachtende […]. (Antwoordt 1670: 6-7, see Meijer Drees 1989: 131)
>
> [were it not that we are aware that that gentleman, exceptionally gifted by nature with general knowledge, has a peculiar distaste for all foreign languages, and any erudition one can draw from them […] It is therefore not surprising that that gentleman boasts all the time of his own invention, for he only speaks his mother tongue and despises all other languages, following Jan Vos’ example […]].

It is interesting to notice that not only forewords of (translated/adapted) plays were used at the height of this confrontation, a true pamphlet war (sometimes fought anonymously) or even more so a controversy. To this the Dutch proto- ‘public opinion’ was well accustomed. The fact that the academy published corrected translations as well is a clear demonstration that the two parties were not so much contending on the issue of whether to translate or not as on *how to translate*, which to them came down to *how to write for the stage*, translation/adaptation/imitation lying at the very core of the Dutch theatrical life of the time. They were using concurrent translations to propagate their own views on theatre and language (Holzhey 2014: 220). In modern translation studies the importance of re-translations is well known, since they allow the interpreter to analyze translation norms and paradigms of an epoch and individual writers who foreground, with a varying degree of awareness, their position in it (Naaijkens 2002: 29-34). In this case, however, playwrights do not contend on issues of ‘translation proper’, but on the construction of the plot in the adaptation and the correctness / appropriateness of the Dutch language in it (see Holzhey 2014: 220ff). Bredero did the same a half century before, when he criticized his predecessor’s (Cornelis van Ghistele from Antwerp) bastardized language in his translation from Terentius (Hermans 1996, 90; Jansen 2011: 200-203). To most of them it must have been self-evident that a translation for the stage had to be an adaptation and they did not question each other’s translation strategies.

Meijer published his own individual reply also: after all, he had been targeted the most. In his frustration for all the criticism received, he surpasses the limits of a civilized disputation. Asselijn is considered to be the same as Jan Vos and ‘his monkey’ [‘wiens Aap hij is’]: he is not even able to understand what Meijer has explained in plain Dutch. As he concludes: ‘it is anyway not my fault if you are a stupid Dutch preacher’ [‘het is immers mijn schuldt niet, dat gy een dome duitsche Klerk zijt’ (Meijer 1670: 18, see Meijer Drees 1989: 132-133).

In his reactions, Asselijn blames his opponents’ stubborn fixation, while he considers it obvious that original work is more valuable than any derivative work (Meijer Drees 1989: 136-137). He also adds one more cutting remark: in his drama *De Looghenaar* [*The Liar*] (1658) Meijer had not mentioned that it was partially adapted from Corneille (*Le Menteur*, 1644). Meijer loses his patience: and he has no problem admitting so, quite unlike his enemy. Asselijn’s old play *Den grooten Kurieen* [*The great Curio*] (1657), he points out, was actually translated from Lope de Vega’s *La Amistad pagada* by someone else whom Asselijn probably had to pay, even if he ‘considers the work as his own’ [‘[hij] reekent het daarom voor ’t zijne’] (Antwoordt 1670: 29, see Jautze, Álvarez Francés and Blom: 28, n. 43).

Thanks to this embittered polemics, another issue is foregrounded on which scholars have drawn attention over the last years, with a growing interest in research into all the agents involved in the cultural industry of the Schouwburg (see the database ONSTAGE, **http://www.vondel.humanities.uva.nl/onstage/**). As Meijer suggested, most of the Spanish plays were first translated in prose by professional translators, often from Sephardic Jews circles, whose versions were rhymed by playwrights. The only name we know for sure is that of Jacobus Baroces (Hermans 1996, 21), who was possibly responsible for the rendering in question. It seems likely that the translation costs were covered by the theatre (Jautze, Álvarez Francés and Blom 2016). Meijer’s attack on Asselijn reveals his feeling of cultural and social superiority: he did not need professional help to access his foreign models, nor did he need to pay anyone for help, unlike the socially and culturally inferior Asselijn whose choice of ‘original’ works was simply the result of material and spiritual poverty.

Closure of the Schouwburg and triumph of the Academicians

In 1672 the Schouwburg closed. The cause was a fire, but also the French invasion of the Republic. The polemics on repertoire contributed to its shutting down as well. When it opened its doors again, in 1677, half of the board of the theatre directors was in hands of the Academicians, who had thus won their struggle and could impose new ‘regulations’. In the following years it would be above all the influential Nil member Andries Pels who would set forth the crusade against Asselijn and his circles with two treatises in verses, à la Horace and Boileau: the first was an actualization of Horace’s *Poetica* (Pels 1678/1973), the second a poem on *Use and Abuse of Theatre* (*Gebruik én misbruik des tooneels*, 1681/1978). The titles speak for themselves. For Pels there can exist no doubt whatsoever as to the supremacy of the classical theoreticians and the modern French ones. He repeatedly stresses French cultural superiority and the need to consider its achievements paradigmatic: ‘Let the French be for us an example’ [‘Laat de Fransche ons tót een voorbeeld zyn’] (Pels 1681/1978, v. 1051). Spanish and English plays, which he does not despise, must be regulated after that model.

Vos is ridiculed for his arrogant relativization of Aristotle and Horace, and for his pretension to judge equally about glass and drama, but one of his favorite targets is precisely Asselijn, ‘pupil of Jan Vos’ [‘leerling van Jan Vos’] (Pels 1681/1978, v. 500). Sarcastically, Pels defend *Mas Anjello’s* author from the accusation of trying to stir social rebellion with his Neapolitan fisher: the play’s construction had so many flaws, was so chaotic and inordinate that no one in the audience could possibly have been moved to insubordination by watching it! The author only wanted to fill his public’s eyes and ears with bombastic action (ivi, v. 493-505). Asselijn receives no compassion and is scorned utterly. But Pels extends his critic to the *poeta vulgaris* also to the *pictor vulgaris* who does not wish to take regulations into account and arrogantly relies on his own creativity: for instance,

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Rembrandt, whose great talent was spoilt because of his refusal to follow both his predecessors (Michelangelo, Rafael, Titian or Van Dyk) and classical rules (ivi, 1093ff).

Asselijn and his party lowered the tone of their voice in the polemic. The growing French hegemony on political and cultural grounds helped the Academicians triumph and overrule their adversaries in the direction of the Schouwburg. The new century would confirm the success of the French-classicist crusade with a strongly regulated theatre repertoire in polished, sober language and a tendency to avoid whatever might cause an uproar in society: no references to religion and a preference for myth and classical history in the subject-matter over biblical plays like Vondel's, a *poeta doctus* whom they admired but also criticized and amended (Holzhey 2014: 110).

Conclusion

What is significant in this war over poetics is its focus on translation. The topic of translation was catapulted to the foreground and became both the battle-field and at certain point the weapon itself. This is a demonstration of the omnipresent importance of translation, deeply embedded in social practice (Frijhoff 2017) and implying a general positive taxonomy of heteroglossia, the importation of foreign ideas (see Burke 2004: 80) and cross-cultural mediation for the construction of the Dutch cultural space, despite the struggle for the purification of the proto-national language in order to render it capable of competing with other vernaculars in Europe.

What was at stake was thus not primarily whether to translate or not – everybody did, including the Schouwburg playwrights, who restlessly mediated foreign cultural products into Dutch society, with great success. A full-blooded theatre-practitioner, involved in all aspects concerning the cultural industry of the Schouwburg, Vos knew better than anyone that adaptations from Spanish, French and classical dramas ensured favor and good revenues. He was himself indebted to classical and modern French models for his *Aran en Titus* and *Medea*. The *Greek Antigone* was a translation from Jean de Rotrou. Even Asselijn, who proudly stated he was not drawing from any foreign model, had of course to adapt and transmedialize a foreign source for his *Mas Anjello*, the chronicle of the Neapolitan upheavals by Giraffi: his *histories* were the result of complex negotiation of a foreign, albeit not poetic or theatrical, model which he followed closely (Prandoni 2008).

Those who declared themselves to be against translation were upholding a stance against an all too passive derivative-imitative poetics and defending original creation as well as *their own* experience as theatre-practitioners against strict regulations handed down by studious, rationalist academicians. This is not to say they were against translations as such: translation is a necessary 'bridge', as Vos himself says, to obtain knowledge from other people, make it your own and pass it off as yours, according to the dominant translation paradigm at the time, based on appropriation of the cultural other (Kasten 2012: 252-256). They were against what they considered to be sterile erudition and excessive dependence on models, especially the classics, which ran the risk of suffocating original creation, defined in pre-romantic terms. They also upheld the rights of an autochthonous Dutch dramatic tradition which, despite being indebted to international models, did not follow them too closely and did not feel the need to meet all of the demands of ancient or modern theoreticians either.

The academic writers, ridiculed for their clumsy plays and finding little favor with audiences, played the card of their higher social status and level of education in the quarrel. The arguments of their adversaries were presented as a consequence of their ignorance of dramatic rules, foreign languages, theoretical essays; their lack of education inevitably led them to refuse foreign models and to maintain an arrogant and stupid confidence in the poet's own genius. Many of the arguments used by the academic writers (the need to pay professional translators, their scorn for manual work, their superiority to monolingual persons, etc.) betray the social undertone of their polemic: this applied also to an 'enlightened' man like Meijer, who had edited a dictionary of foreign technical terms in order to help those who only knew Dutch. Their adversaries could only reply with the 'populist' topos of the frenzied man of letters, lacking practical experience and unable to judge fairly due to his excessive erudition. Vos's refusal to bow to antiquity is on the contrary a much more interesting stance which could only be touched upon here, suggesting an awareness among the Dutch population – even the low-middle class with no university education – that the Republic and its citizens were the forerunners of a proud new era: the modern times.

The discursive presence of translation in the public debate confirms that translation and intercultural intercourse stood high on the agenda of the Republic, in all of its social layers, and deeply influenced all domains of knowledge, including the arts. And thus it happened that a struggle to rule one of the most important cultural institutions of the Republic, the Amsterdam Theatre, could be fought on the very idea of translation, and by means of (counter) translations.

Note: all translation from the Dutch are by the author unless otherwise stated.

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