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Aphra Behn's use of *translatio*: Mediation, adaptation, and emulation in a cross-channel perspective*

Line Cottegnies
Sorbonne Université, France

Abstract: Recent historians of fiction have shown that the "British" novel was essentially a transnational phenomenon in the Restoration. French was the dominant source language for literary translation as a whole in the Restoration period, and translations played a prominent role in the development of a national literature. Aphra Behn, whose role as a translator and adaptor of French texts is now recognized, offers a perfect vantage point from which to measure the multifaceted impact of French literature on seventeenth-century English literature. The sheer range of her strategies as a translator is extraordinary as she explores all the shades between literal paraphrase and free imitation. This article argues that far from being merely commercial her translations form a coherent body of works which manifests a form of emulation with their originals that is fully creative.

Keywords: Translation, Aphra Behn, fiction, Restoration, imitations.

El uso de la *translatio* de Aphra Behn: mediación, adaptación y emulación desde una perspectiva anglocontinental†

Resumen: Recientemente, historiadores de la ficción han demostrado que la novela «británica» era esencialmente un fenómeno transnacional en la Restauración. El francés era el idioma de partida dominante para la traducción literaria en general en el periodo de la Restauración, y las traducciones tuvieron un papel importante en el desarrollo de una literatura nacional. Aphra Behn, cuyo papel como traductora y adaptadora de textos franceses es ahora reconocido, ofrece un punto de vista perfecto desde el cual se puede medir el impacto multifacético de la literatura francesa en la literatura inglesa del siglo xvii. El rango de sus estrategias como traductora es extraordinario, explorando los matices entre la paráfrasis literal y la imitación libre. Este artículo defiende que, lejos de ser meramente comerciales, sus traducciones forman un corpus coherente que manifiesta una forma

O uso de *translatio* por Aphra Behn: mediação, adaptação e emulação a partir de uma perspetiva anglocontinental‡

Resumo: Historiadores recentes da ficção têm mostrado que o romance «britânico» foi essencialmente um fenómeno transnacional na Restauração. O francês foi a língua de partida dominante para a tradução literária no período da Restauração, e as traduções desempenharam um papel proeminente no desenvolvimento de uma literatura nacional. Aphra Behn, cujo papel como tradutora e adaptadora de textos franceses é agora reconhecido, oferece um ponto de vista perfeito para avaliar o impacto multifacetado da literatura francesa na literatura inglesa do século xvii. O leque das suas estratégias como tradutora é extraordinário, uma vez que explora todo o espetro entre a paráfrase literal e a imitação livre. Este artigo argumenta que, longe de serem meramente comerciais, as suas traduções formam um corpo coerente de obras que re-

* Many thanks to the anonymous readers of this article; all remaining errors are mine.
† Translation into Spanish by Tamara Pérez-Fernández.
‡ Translation into Portuguese by Miguel Ramalhete.

completamente creativa de emulación de sus textos originales.

Palabras clave: Traducción, Aphra Behn, ficción, Restauración, imitaciones.

vela uma forma de emulação inteiramente criativa perante os textos originais.

Palabras-chave: Tradução, Aphra Behn, ficção, Restauração, imitações.

1. Introduction

Aphra Behn's importance as a translator, although routinely acknowledged, is still often seen as anecdotal by critics.[1] There are several reasons for this: translation is still sometimes considered by critics as secondary; and it is assumed that Behn turned to translation from the French mainly for economic reasons in difficult times — and therefore that it was for her a commercial activity, which somehow makes it disreputable. To this we can also add that few English-speaking scholars read French, and that even for those who do comparing a translation with the original text might seem like a thankless task. But translation was not seen as a uniformly menial activity in the period — translation from the classics certainly was not —, and it was a vital field.[2] The fact that an important literary figure like Behn should have dedicated five years of her life to a career as a translator of contemporary French texts and published no fewer than six works from the French should encourage us to take them seriously.[3] Behn's oeuvre offers in fact a perfect vantage point from which to measure the multifaceted impact of French literature in Restoration England. The sheer variety of texts she chose to translate allowed her to experiment with new forms. As a translator, she also sampled a range of creative strategies, probing all the shades between literal word-for-word paraphrase and free imitation, and displaying an authorial creativity which forces us to take her translations seriously. Yet her engagement with recent French works reveals both emulation of and resistance to her models, even though her own poetry and fiction

[1] The specific nature of the translations has been a nagging question, and the danger is attributing to Behn ideas and literary tropes that belong to the original authors rather than her. A case in point is the scholarly work done on *Agnes de Castro*, see below. There are some notable exceptions, like Laura L. Runge whose recent study treats the translations exactly like the original works (2023).

[2] About women and translation, see in particular Clarke (2010) and Belle (2012). For the status of translation in the Restoration more particularly, see Davis (2008) and Overton (2015).

[3] In the ongoing *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn* (Behn 2021–), Behn's French translations are published according to genres: her poetic translations in volume V with the poetry, *Agnes de Castro* and *La Montre* in volume VII (with the fiction), and her Fontenelle translation in volume VIII (with the non-fictional prose works). This strong editorial intervention shows that the creative nature of the translations is taken seriously. The Todd edition gathered all the translations into a separate volume (Behn 1993, vol. 4), except the poetic translations and *Agnes de Castro*.

were marked by this intimate frequentation of French precedents. It could be argued that this complicated creative rivalry shaped much of Restoration literature.This article, which integrates some recent work done for the Cambridge edition,[4] suggests that a reconsideration of Behn's practice as a translator is in order, and that Behn fashioned herself as an author also through this encounter with French literature. After briefly discussing the status of French literature in the Restoration, which could explain her turn to translation in the first place, I focus on her choice of texts and then on the question of how "commercial" her translations actually were. As will be apparent, Behn asserts the dignity of the translator not only by defending her status at every turn, but also by becoming something of a co-author in her translations.

2. Behn's selection of texts

In an often-quoted letter to bookseller Jacob Tonson written in late 1683 or early 1684, Behn pleaded for him to increase her fee (from £20 to £25) for the collection to be published later in 1684 as *Poems Upon Several Occasions*. The volume was to include an enlarged translation of Paul Tallemant's *Voyage de l'Isle d'amour* (1663), an allegorical narrative in prosimetric form which she translated entirely in verse as "A Voyage to the Isle of Love." Defending her endeavour, Behn argues:

> As for you can not think wt a preety thing ye Island will be, and wt a deale of labor I shall have yet with it: and if that pleases, I will do the 2d voyage, wch will compose a little book as big as a novel by it self. (Bernard 2015, 85–6)

The warmth with which she defends the inclusion of this "preety thing" suggests that she considers it an asset for sales and a significant achievement (which will require a great "deal of labour"). It does not seem to be just a way of cramming more lines into the volume, although a longer work would of course have paid more. Behn obviously failed to convince Tonson to publish the sequel ("the 2d voyage"), and *Lycidus* was only published four years later by Joseph Knight and Francis Saunders, together with another verse miscellany. The 1688 volume's full title — *Lycidus, or, The lover in fashion being an account from Lycidus to Lysander,*

[4] I am currently editing Behn's translations of Bonnecorse's *La Montre, or the Lover's Watch* (1686), Brilhac's *Agnes de Castro* (1688), and Fontenelle's *Discovery of New Worlds* (1688) for the Cambridge edition (Vol. VII and VIII, forthcoming).

of his voyage from the Island of Love, from the French by the same author of The voyage to the Isle of Love — makes explicit the connection of the "2d voyage" with the first, as well as its status as a translation (Behn 1688c). The letter to Tonson suggests that Behn might have chosen herself the pieces she wanted to translate or adapt, rather than being prompted by her booksellers. Although she is sometimes seen as a commercial translator, it is worth remembering that she might very well have considered herself as an artisan, crafting her translations "with a great deal of labour."

By the early 1680s, French fiction was being translated in droves. It has been estimated that about a third of the works of fiction published between 1660 and 1700 were translations from the French.[5] The new English court, which had to reinvent itself after the Interregnum, embraced French cultural models. Louis XIV's court was recognized as the "fashionable hub of European culture" (Claydon and Levillain 2016, 10). In music, dance, fashion, gardens, architecture, the visual arts, and literature, France set the trends, and Charles II's court followed.[6] In multilingual Canterbury where she grew up, Behn would have encountered many French Protestant exiles and might have been exposed to French from a very early age. It can be assumed that if she was sent abroad as a spy in the 1660s it is because she was able to speak French (and possibly Dutch).[7] But the French cultural dominance also caused some anxiety in the period: opponents to the Stuart rule feared the imperialistic agenda of France and objected to the favorable policies towards Catholics. The backlash that followed the revelation of the Popish Plot, and the Exclusion Crisis, fuelled a suspicion which also manifested itself in a resistance to French cultural models (Harris 2016). This was compounded by issues of national identity, as the cultural emulation of and rivalry with France became central in the emergence and assertion of a national culture in England.

For part of the English elite, however, France was still the nation of sociability, whose literature provided models of civility especially in

[5] It was 40% according to Mary Helen McMurran (2002, 53). According to the new ENEID database of Restoration English fiction at Universidad de Huelva (forthcoming), 197 works published between 1660 and 1700 are out of the French (including parts of the same works and collections), out of 616 (i.e. 32%). I am grateful to Sonia Villegas López for these figures.

[6] For an overview of French cultural influence, see Charlanne (1906) and more recently Stedman (2013, 62–107).

[7] The men with whom Behn collaborated on her spying mission in Flanders, Jerome Nipho and Antoine de Marcès, were both French speakers who wrote to each other in French. I am grateful to Karen Britland (forthcoming) for insights into Behn's activities as a spy (in private correspondence).

matters of *galanterie*, understood as an aristocratic ethos which defined the relationships between men and women.[8] The concept caused some incomprehension in England, where it was often viewed with suspicion as hypocritical or foppish.[9] The appropriation of French models often shows a combination of admiration and wariness in the period. While some "translations" were hastily produced to respond to a growing demand,[10] others consisted in more creative, but often competitive, adaptations; some even present fascinating instances of creative "imitation" (see Dryden 1680, A8r–v). For these, McMurran speaks of a new "translatio," which implies a whole "cultural and literary dynamic" (2002, 51). Since French literature came into high demand, it was only natural for a professional author who spoke the language like Behn to turn to translation. In the preface to *A Discovery of New Worlds*, she concedes that "*It is Modish to Ape the* French *in every thing*" (1688a, A6r), but her practice offers illuminating examples of ambivalent and competitive translation strategies, reflecting in particular what happens when rather exclusive texts are adapted for a wider readership. All the works Behn translated had been fashionable among polite circles in Paris in the second half of the seventeenth century. All but one are about love and had been published in the previous twenty years — three of them in the last two years. Four of these works (the two Tallemant "Voyages," Bonnecorse's *La Montre* and to a certain extent La Rochefoucauld's "Reflections on Morality") discuss love in the context of *galanterie*. For three of her translations — *La Montre* and the two Voyages —, Behn might have at least in part used the 1684 (augmented) edition of a fashionable French miscellany, *Recueil de pieces galantes en prose et en vers de Madame la Comtesse de la Suze*.[11] Incidentally, the fourth volume of this set includes a poem that Behn imitated in "The Golden Age. A Paraphrase

[8] *Galanterie* was much more than an attitude towards courtship in seventeenth century France. It conveyed an ideal of sociability based on courtesy, politeness, the mastery of the art of conversation and of a particular form of wit (see Viala 2008). For its often satirical reception in England, see Scholar (2020, 32–41).

[9] In *The Man of Mode*, Bellair comments about the eponymous hero: "He thinks himself the Pattern of modern Gallantry," to which Dorimant answers: "He is indeed the pattern of modern Foppery" (Etherege 1676, 12).

[10] In sales catalogues of the period, it is not uncommon to see novels sold by the dozen. See, for instance, Wellington's advertisement beneath the imprint on the title page of *The Rehearsal*: "Gentlemen and Ladies may pick Novels stitch'd, at 6s. a Dozen" (quoted in Orr 2018, 416).

[11] This collection, known as the Suze-Pellisson miscellany after the names of its two dedicatees, went through a number of editions. Langbaine had indicated this as a possible source, remarking on Behn's skill as a translator: "Her several Versions from the *French* are commended by those who think themselves Judges of Wit; amongst which the chiefest are, *A Voyage to the Island of Love*; *Lycidas, or The Lover in Fashion*; and *The Lover's Watch*. These Pieces in the Original may be found in the second and third Tomes of *Le Receueil des Pieces Gallantes, en Prose & en Vers*, 8° Paris 1684. Those who will take the pains to compare them, will find the English rather Paraphrases, than

on a Translation out of French," published in her 1684 *Poems on Several Occasions*, and for which no source has hitherto been identified, to the best of my knowledge.[12]

It seems clear, however, that Behn was ambivalent about French *galanterie* and she adopts consistent strategies of mediation for her English readership. The first of Tallemant's prosimetric narratives, *Voyage de l'Isle d'amour* (originally 1663), was inspired by Madeleine de Scudéry's chaste allegorical map of tenderness discussed in her romance, *Clélie* (volume 1, 1654; translated in 1655). Behn adapts it as a long tongue-in-cheek narrative poem which always seems on the verge of turning into a satire.[13] In her subsequent version of Tallemant's *Second Voyage* (initially 1667), "Lycidus," she fully plays along its more playful, libertine approach to love, which chimed in with English contemporary tastes. The added subtitle of the latter work in English, "the Lover in fashion," perhaps an allusion to Etherege's *The Man of Mode*, signals to her knowing readers. Between the two "voyages," Behn also published an adaptation of La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions morales*, initially written for the salon of Madame de Sablé and first published in 1665 ("Reflections on Morality, or Seneca Unmasqued," in *Miscellany*, Behn 1685), but she shows little sympathy for the French moralist's introspective, Augustinian outlook. While his maxims must be read as reaction against such précieux works as Bonnecorse's or Tallemant's and an encouragement to self-examination, Behn turns them into cynical rules about how to be successful in society, and especially in matters of love (Cottegnies 2004). Then came her playful version of Balthazar de Bonnecorse's *précieux* prosimetric fiction *La Montre* (1666), published as *La Montre, or the Lover's Watch* (1686), written as a love almanach sent by Iris to her lover with recommendations on how to behave in her absence. Behn makes her Iris more assertive and gives her more complex feelings and more sensuality than her French counterpart: the English Iris often comes through as more passionate. She adds, for instance, Damon's erotic fetishization of Iris's hands (1686, 222). The focus on Iris's body introduces a playful titillation in the text that is only suggested in the original, but to which Behn fully responds.

just Translations: but which sufficiently shew the Fancy and excellent Abilities of our Authress" (Langbaine 1691, 23).

[12] "L'Age d'Or," in anon. 1684 (4: 318–20). Behn might have consulted this anthology for inspiration for other amorous poems like "To the Fair Clarinda, who made Love to me, imagin'd more than Woman," which seems to contain echoes of "À une dame qu'elle galantisoit comme sa maîtresse" (1684, 2: 190). These poems were often reprinted in collective miscellanies.

[13] See Overton (2015).

In light of Behn's letter to Tonson quoted above and the relative thematic unity of this first group of works, it seems extremely likely that Behn was involved in the choice of works she translated; but, while all are representative of an aristocratic culture for which she had some sympathy, they also revisit the notion of *galanterie* with a wryness that she might have found more appropriate for her English readership. As far as her last two translations (both published by William Canning in 1688) are concerned, they experiment with different genres: *Agnes de Castro, or the Force of Generous Love* is a short historical and sentimental novel, presented as being "by a lady" (later attributed to Jean-Baptiste de Brilhac; 1688b); and *A Discovery of New Worlds* is a translation of Fontenelle's best-selling work of scientific popularization, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (Fontenelle 1686; Behn 1688a).[14] *Agnes de Castro*, as a "Portuguese history" (the subtitle of the anonymous French original), is set in medieval Portugal; "Portuguese histories" had become a popular subgenre in France since the success of Guilleragues's *Lettres portugaises* (1669), translated in 1678 as *Five Love-Letters from a Nun to a Cavalier*. The latter novel, which went through at least nine editions between 1678 and 1716, was also successful in English, and probably inspired Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1684–1685).[15] For Behn, the choice of *Agnes de Castro*, which had just been published in French, constitutes a foray into sentimental fiction at a time when she was herself experimenting with fiction: *Agnes de Castro* was published the same year as *Oroonoko* and *The Fair Jilt*, and the three novels were reissued with a new title-page as *Three Histories*, also in 1688. Her last translated work, *A Discovery of New Worlds*, shows a new intellectual ambition, although Fontenelle had also written his work of scientific and philosophical popularization for elite salons: Fontenelle's *Discours*, which became a European bestseller, presents itself as a dialogue between a "philosopher" and a lady who is being taught about cosmology and astronomy. Given the variety of genres to which her translations belong but their relative unity as polite works initially written for an elite readership, they must have obeyed a personal literary and intellectual agenda rather than being merely commercially-motivated.

[14] As for *The History of Oracles* (also 1688), it was only attributed to her by Samuel Briscoe in 1699 (and included in her collected works from 1700). Since Behn acknowledged all her translations, it is unlikely that this text be by her; it is also devoid of the stylistic traits attributed to her.

[15] "Portuguese" histories did not become a subgenre in England as they did in France.

3. Marketing and commercial strategies

Yet the economic argument cannot simply be brushed aside: at least three of the works Behn translated led to an intense competition among translators and booksellers and show signs of having been hastily finished. Two obviously followed marketing strategies that could be called misleading or disingenuous. Behn's translations do not exist in a void: her translation of La Rochefoucauld was the second one to appear (Behn 1685), after John Davies of Kidwelly published his in 1670; two versions of *Agnes de Castro* came out in 1688 within days of each other (Brilhac 1688; Behn 1688b), and three English versions of Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) were published within two years — one in Dublin in 1687, which seems to have gone unnoticed in London, and another one in London in 1688 alongside Behn's (Fontenelle 1687 and 1688). The translations of *Agnes de Castro* and Fontenelle's *Entretiens* led to a fierce competition between the *same* booksellers, William Canning (for Behn's texts), and Richard Bentley and S[usanna] Magnes. This cut-throat rivalry between booksellers suggests that translations of French bestsellers had become profitable by the 1680s.[16] Belon's "The Fatal Beauty of Agnes de Castro" was licensed only five days before Behn's own *Agnes* and appeared in a volume entitled *Two New Novels* printed for Bentley and Magnes (Brilhac 1688). This could explain the haste with which Canning obviously published *A Discovery of New Worlds*, perhaps in the hope that he would beat the latter to the press this time.[17] It seems that as Behn was working on the Fontenelle, they heard about a rival version (John Glanvill's), and hers was hurried through the press. Both Behn's *Agnes* and *Discovery* show signs of haste, with errors or typos which would probably have been caught at the proofreading stage otherwise. In the case of *Agnes de Castro*, the relationship between Behn's and Belon's versions is not clear, and it might have involved some triangulation (Cottegnies 2022).[18] Both translations keep close to the French, which makes some overlap inevitable, but the verbal echoes suggest a more intimate relationship than just the relay of the French, as potentially confirmed by stylometric softwares.[19] Perhaps Behn had Be-

[16] Orr argues, at any rate, that translating successful works from French were "less of a gamble" than publishing new English works for booksellers (Orr 2018, 416).
[17] *A Discovery of New Worlds* is listed in the Term Catalogue for Trinity 1688 in July 1688 (Arber 1905, 233).
[18] See Headnote to text, Cambridge forthcoming edition.
[19] Sorbonne Université-developed Phoebus and Medite softwares used. This was confirmed by an unpublished stylometric study by Mel Evans (whom I would like to thank).

lon's translation close at hand as she was working on hers, although, if that was what happened, then the text was reformulated and corrected stylistically. The similarities are mainly concentrated in the last third of the text. A note inserted with a list of errata in most extant copies of *Discovery of New Worlds* — either at the end of the author's dedication, or at the end of the book — testifies to this fierce competition: "Hearing a Translation of the *Plurality of Worlds*, was doing by another Hand, the Translator had not the opportunity to supervise and correct the Sheets before they were wrought off; so that several *Errata* have escaped." It reveals that Behn cared enough about this allegedly mercenary job to have normally expected to proofread her translation before publication, and that she was sufficiently irritated about her inability to do so to force the printer to include this note, obviously added in haste. The title-page was also tinkered with to increase the appeal of the book: the surviving title-page in all extant copies except one, which presents the words New Worlds in large, bold types in elegant blackletter, is in fact a cancellans (Wing F1412). The Library of Congress holds a unique copy (to the best of my knowledge) of a variant title-page, which could be its uncorrected, first state (F1412A; see fig. 1 on the following page).[20]

Someone — either the bookseller or Behn — must have found the latter inelegant, perhaps too bland, and it was replaced by the definitive title-page. The second title-page certainly does a better job of advertising the contents of the book, and in particular its preface, "ESSAY on Translated PROSE." The latter is presented in a descriptive blurb as a major addition to the work and a serious piece of scholarship engaging with Father Tacquet — largely a misleading claim since the translator admits to not having read Tacquet —, and "[w]holly new," another deceiving claim, since this was the third translation of the Fontenelle text to appear in English. What seems to have gone unnoticed, however, is that this second title-page was re-designed to plagiarize the title-page of the fourth edition of *A Discovery of a New World* by the late John Wilkins, which had only recently been published (1684). Not only does the title of Behn's translation explicitly echo this treatise (which she used extensively in her preface), perhaps as a way of differentiating this version from the other translations whose titles were closer to the French title, but the very layout of the title-page, down to the characteristic blackletter used to highlight the words New Worlds, also clearly aligns it with Wilkins's treatise: investing Behn's translation with a philosophical

[20] F1412A has recently become available in EEBO. A puzzling fact about this title-page is that it was also tipped in, although this could have happened at the conservation stage.

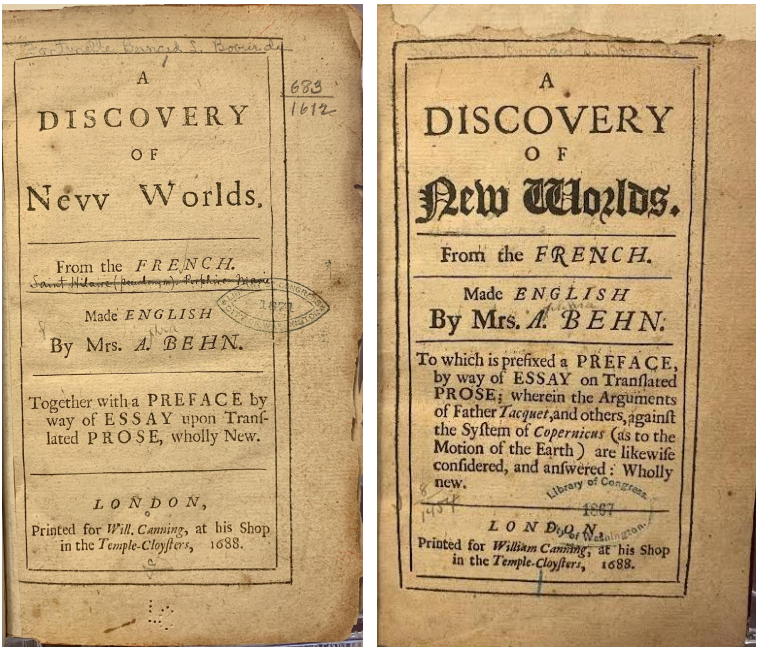

Figure 1: Aphra Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds*, Shelfmarks QB54.F67 (uncorrected) QB54.F68 (corrected), Rare Book and Special Collections Division of the Library of Congress, Washington, DC

varnish, it seems to promise more of the same. This marketing strategy, packaging the translation as a serious piece of scholarship, might also reflect the bookseller's anxiety in the face of competition, which seems to be confirmed by the hesitation between the two title-pages.

These commercial aspects — the haste, the competition, the hype — might explain why some of Behn's translations from the French have acquired a paradoxical status within her canon and have caused some confusion among readers, perhaps also for lack of access to the original French texts, not to mention their editorial history. *Agnes de Castro* has thus often been read as an original work, although its initial title-page makes no mystery about its nature as a translation: this might be due to the fact that the novel is systematically published alongside Behn's original fiction in contemporary editions, although it is one of her most literal translations (see Starr 1990, 368). The confusion might derive from the

fact that *Agnes de Castro* was published the same year as Behn's original short fiction, *Oroonoko* and *The Fair Jilt*, by the same bookseller, Canning, and was included in *Three Histories*, perhaps itself as a response to Bentley and Magnes's *Two New Novels*, the collection which included Belon's rival translation. Behn's *Agnes de Castro* definitively entered the canon of her original works when it was included in Briscoe's *Histories and Novels of the Late Mrs Behn* in 1696 and all the subsequent reprints, and its status as a translation was obscured. It thus acquired the status of an original work by contiguity, to the point that it was even re-translated into French in the eighteenth century (Behn 1761). Similarly, the nature of "Voyage to the Isle of Love" and "Lycidus" as translations or adaptations is often overlooked, although they were originally presented as being "from the French." Because they were originally published as companion pieces to Behn's own poetry, their relationship to their originals was erased, which is all the easier as the French originals are little-known, and considerably transformed.[21]

The status of *La Montre, Or, The Lover's Watch* in critical discourse has been more ambiguous, although its immediate publishing history was similar to that of *Agnes de Castro* as it was reprinted in the 1696 *Histories and Novels* as an original work.[22] *La Montre* was popular in the seventeenth century. Behn's version, almost three times the length of the French, consists of an extremely creative imitation. In the subsequent editions of the 1696 collection it was split into two works: the first and second parts were entitled *The Lover's Watch; or, The Art of Making Love*, and the third section, "The Looking-Glass, Sent from Damon to Iris," became *The Lady's Looking-Glass, to Dress Herself by; or, The Whole Art of Charming All Mankind*, which turned the more frankly erotic section of the original into a completely independent work. It seems that the chaster first part of *La Montre* was a favorite among ladies, which, given its subject-matter, its tonality, and the focus on the female speaker in the story, is hardly surprising; but this section was also perceived by some as too cerebral. A gendered reception is suggested by Susanna Centlivre in *The Perjur'd Husband; or, The Adventures of Venice* (1700), in which Ludvico, a fop, is found by Lucy vituperating "The Lover's Watch": "I found him in his study reading the Lover's Watch, which he swears does not at all agree with his Constitution. He hates injunctions of Love, like those of Pennance." For Lady Pizalta this is revealing of

[21] In 1697, the two texts were reissued as a continuous narrative in two parts in *Poems upon Several Occasions; with a Voyage to the Island of Love.*

[22] For a notable exception, see Newman (2020).

Ludvico's coarseness (Centlivre 1700, 11). *La Montre* continued to be published into the eighteenth century; as was the case with *Agnes de Castro*, its status as a translation was forgotten when it was retranslated into French as an original English work (Behn 1789). Yet in spite of this, and in spite of the creativity Behn invested in the adaptation, it is little studied today.

4. Behn's elusive, versatile strategies as a translator

Another reason that might explain the ambivalent status of some of Behn's translations might simply be her versatile attitude to her craft, an agility that makes it difficult for readers to identify her position as a translator. She covers all the shades of translation from almost perfectly literal paraphrase to free imitation, and sometimes within the same work. In *Translation and the Poet's Life*, a study of appropriation and emulation of the Classics by five Restoration and Augustan authors, Paul Davis concedes that "[p]robably no watertight theoretical distinction between 'translation' and 'imitation' is possible," but he argues that this distinction was valid for seventeenth century translators, who were themselves "readers brought up to discriminate between the several gradations of writerly indebtedness," for whom this distinction remained "a practicable dividing line" (Davis 2008, 5; 6). This caveat reminds us that the concept of faithfulness needs to be historicized, although it is probably one of the most difficult tasks for literary historians. Because they were habitually trained to translate the Classics, early-modern translators had a sophisticated and fluid conception of translation, which included many shades between the two extremes of servile paraphrase and creative imitation. It is important, therefore, to shift the argument away from issues of accuracy or faithfulness to look rather at the politics and poetics of literary transfer in the translator's distinctive practice (Melehy 2010). What's more, in the seventeenth century, "imitation" was itself a particularly hazy concept. In his preface to the *Pindarique Odes*, Cowley refashioned the conventional paradigm, pitting servile imitation against a more creative one, defined as a "libertine way of rendring foreign Authors" (Cowley 1656, Aaa2v). In his preface to *Ovid's Epistles* — a collection to which Behn contributed —, Dryden famously defined three modes of translation, which, although they do not render the subtlety of all the shades in between, are still useful to frame the debate on translation: "metaphrase" or word-for-word trans-

lation, "paraphrase" or "translation with a latitude," and "imitation," in which the translator "assumes the liberty not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion" (1680, A8r). Dryden was taking a stance, here, in the controversy raised by the recent modernized versions of the Classics. Between the two extremes of literalism and imitation that thrived at the expense of the original, Dryden advocated a *via media*, or "translation with latitude," which was by no means entirely free. But this was for the Classics; for the translation of vernacular contemporary literature there were no standards to respect and no canonical status to emulate, and therefore no prestige to be gained for the translator. As Spearing remarks, "consideration of late seventeenth-century theories of translation in relation to the works of Aphra Behn is of limited usefulness" (1996, 156). This is true insofar as Behn, who displays a remarkable dexterity, did not adopt a consistent strategy, but it does not mean that Behn herself was not highly conscious of her practice as a translator.

La Montre alone illustrates her subtlety as a translator as she uses the three modalities of translation defined by Dryden, and all the shades in between. *La Montre* consists of a fictional, epistolary conduct book in prose interspersed with verse, sent by Iris to her courtier lover Damon to map out what his occupations of the day should be in her absence, hour by hour. In the wake of Scudéry's Map of Tender, *La Montre* reads like a secular (and mundane) book of hours. It comes with its own equivalent of a map, an allegorical clock describing Damon's ideal day according to Iris. Behn's version adapts the French original using a range of strategies from close paraphrase to imitation, not to mention digressions. All of Bonnecorse's text is translated, mostly in the modes of "metaphrase" or "paraphrase" (to quote Dryden), but Behn often takes liberties with the text which alter its tonality: the English version is more playful, and occasionally more risqué, than the original, which shows more concern for decorum. The female speaker Iris is given more autonomy. Many of Behn's changes are cultural adaptations for an English Restoration reader — locations are changed to London ones, for instance, and she introduces a familiar world of fops and coquettes. But there are also more creative interventions, such as free additions. She thus includes (among other additions) a long, enthusiastic 650-word-long digression praising the beauties of Windsor, "the most glorious Palace in the Christian World," as a homage to Charles II (Behn 1686, 154). Windsor Castle and gardens had been remodeled between 1675 and 1684, and Behn's praise of the renovations was still

topical. There are other instances of creative intervention: in particular Behn inserts poetic odes with additional titles into the text in lieu of the couplets or quatrains of the original — which turns the volume into a poetic miscellany in its own right. One of the odes is even reproduced in the *Lycidus* volume (Behn 1686, 112; 1688c, 132–33). Yet the poems of *La Montre* have been largely overlooked by Behn's scholars, although they present some fascinating overlaps with the "official" canon of her verse.

As this example shows, Aphra Behn fully availed herself of the freedom granted to the translator of vernacular texts. To map out her practice as a translator, it is necessary to offer a tentative typology of her translated works. A first group includes her more literal translations, in which the translator's voice remains unobtrusive. Although it might come as a source of disappointment to some, *Agnes de Castro* is exactly what it says it is on the title-page, i.e. a literal translation, and it belongs in this group. This status might explain why it is a hapax in Behn's career as an author of fiction, as her only sentimental piece, focussing as it does on sacrifice and sublime feelings. It is entirely devoid of the characteristic wryness one tends to associate with her voice. It is also the only one of her stories that fits the category of the "nouvelle historique et galante," which had become all the rage in France, and her only "Portuguese" story. At the other extreme, in a second group, some of her translations must be defined as free imitations, like her Tallemant, Bonnecorse, and La Rochefoucauld texts — although each of them includes all the shades of the continuum between literal and free translation. Behn thus adapts La Rochefoucauld's maxims for her English readership, feminizing the speaker, and applying a female perspective to many reflections; more fundamentally, she rewrites the volume as part of an ongoing conversation between two lovers, Aminta and Lysander, the two personae of "The Voyage of Love," who also feature in some of her poems (Cottegnies 2005). This creates rich echoes between many of her works and has intriguing consequences. When she adapts La Rochefoucauld's anti-feminist maxims, for instance, her persona sounds at times very much like a female rake. Thus La Rochefoucauld writes: "When we are tired of loving someone, we are quite content to find out they have been unfaithful to us" (my paraphrase; 1675, 31). But while for the French moralist this should lead us to question our own indignities, Behn turns the impersonal maxim into an assertive rule for women to act cynically as a consequence: "When we are weary of a lover, we are very well pleased to find him unfaithful, that we may

be disengaged from our Fidelity" (Behn 1685, 336). La Rochefoucauld, deeply influenced by the Port Royal movement, had written his maxims to help gentlemen and ladies negotiate life in society and pierce through the often shameful nature of their motivations. If he had described life in society as a comedy of appearances, he meant his text to be a call for introspection. Behn deliberately turns the maxims into cynical snippets of wisdom applicable to a society of rakes, fops, jilts and coxcombs, governed by competition and selfishness. Her version of the maxims thus constitutes a truly original work.

Behn's version of Fontenelle's *Discovery of New Worlds* falls into a category of its own, for although it is mostly a fairly literal translation it reveals Behn's fascinating editorial work, and it is preceded by its remarkable preface. "The Translator's Preface" is an ambitious piece of scholarship and a marketing coup (Ferguson 2008; Gill 2020). It foregrounds the role of the translator as a mediator, but also, more remarkably, as a critic, far from the strategies of self-effacement often adopted by commercial translators in the period. It is presented on the title-page and in the running titles as an "ESSAY on Translated PROSE," a direct reference to the Earl of Roscommon's celebrated *Essay on Translated Verse*. The latter, published to some acclaim in 1684 with Dryden's sanction, started with a homage to the English language, praised for its vigor and brevity compared to the flourishes and copia of French (4). Roscommon's simple advice to aspiring translators of the Classics was to choose for themselves an author with whom they felt an affinity. Behn's own "essay" appears to be following suit, focusing on the translation of prose and from the vernacular. For this, however, she adopts the persona of a confident professional female translator who offers no excuses for writing and assumes a great deal of authority in intellectual matters — linguistic, critical, and, even more remarkably, philosophical and scientific. She first comments on her strategy as a translator. Rather unsurprisingly at a time when England was vying culturally with France, the latter is described as a flimsy nation, and its language florid, with a predilection for ornament and amplification. Radicalizing Roscommon's argument, Behn satirically draws a parallel between the changeable nature of French and their fashion, and develops the topos of the rivalry between England and France to present a nationalistic view of the genealogy of European languages (with English on top), borrowed in part from Wilkins's *Essay Towards a Real Character* (1668). Making English closer to Latin than French, she concludes with great assurance that French is the hardest European

language from which to translate, and to prove it she offers some examples of what she sees as the main difficulties for a translator, such as the musicality of French (which can override grammar rules) and its predilection for copia (1688a, sig. [A5v–A7r]).

Then the translator turns philosopher and critic: the merit of Fontenelle's work, she argues, is to offer a playful introduction to complex questions of astronomy, and, in particular, a defense of Copernicus, couched in a language and form that can be understood by everyone. But she adds a disclaimer: Fontenelle has turned everything into a jest, which makes him liable to accusations of libertinism, especially because ordinary readers cannot distinguish between scientifically sound arguments and fanciful quips: "*He ascribes all to Nature, and says not a Word of God Almighty, from the Beginning to the End; so that one would almost take him to be a* Pagan," Behn comments (Behn 1688a, sig. [A8v]). That Fontenelle's book was deemed contentious is obvious from its reception: the 1686 edition (used by Behn) was put on the Catholic Index of prohibited books in 1687, which led Fontenelle to make changes in following editions. But the book's playful dialogical form chimed in with the contemporary taste for conversation and gallantry, and it was a major success, as attested by its number of editions — thirty-three in Fontenelle's own lifetime. The text translated into all the major European languages. By making a show of criticizing Fontenelle's alleged radicality, Behn shows her awareness of his contentious method: his philosopher repeatedly makes fanciful, even blasphemous, hypotheses which question the centrality of the Christian dogma on issues such as the status of man, the Earth, or, more fundamentally, the authority of the divine Word, only to dismiss them as mere thought experiments (Gill 2020). Behn thus skillfully dissociates herself from the audacious implications of Fontenelle's speculations about the moon's inhabitants (Cottegnies 2003); her critique of Fontenelle appears to be very much tongue-in-cheek, however. In the context of the contemporary competition between science and religion for cultural authority, Fontenelle's work sounds at times suspiciously close to heterodox theses. Yet, under the pretense of reconciling the Scriptures and the new science, Behn's own approach is potentially as tricky as Fontenelle's eloquent silence on the subject, even in Protestant England, notably more tolerant of new ideas than Catholic France. The authority of the Bible was clearly challenged by the new science, particularly astronomy (Markley 2007, 204). To save Copernicanism from contradicting the Bible, Behn adeptly confronts the Scriptures, showing that they cannot, and should not, be

used as either denying or endorsing the new ideas about the cosmos: "*with all due Reverence and Respect to the Word of God, I hope I may be allowed to say, that the design of the Bible was not to instruct Mankind in Astronomy, Geometry, or Chronology, but in the Law of God, to lead us to Eternal Life*" (Behn 1688a, a1v). By arguing that it was possible to remain faithful to the spirit of the Word of God while supporting the new scientific ideas, she was contributing to the emerging debate about fideism, a doctrine which posited the separation of matters of faith and reason.

Behn's preface thus foregrounds the empowering image of a woman intellectual who proves a critical and judicious reader and editor, as well as an engaged translator. In her translation, she lightly edits Fontenelle's text, introducing corrections for some points she thinks erroneous, and often clarifying the expression out of consideration for her reader. In one instance in particular, she edits Fontenelle's figure for the height of the atmosphere, changing it from twenty leagues (about eighty kilometers) to two or three miles. Although Fontenelle was in fact following the latest science here, this correction shows that Behn was actively engaging with the text — probably checking it against Wilkins's *Discovery of a New World*. Other kinds of interventions, more personal, concern matters of interpretation. Behn thus introduces references to the New World where Fontenelle had mentioned "some new discovered lands," probably "Terra australis," in reference to recent explorations (1686, 135); instead, Behn mentions "the new discovered world of *America*," perhaps more familiar to her, especially in light of her alleged transatlantic passage (Behn 1688a, 61). In the preface, she admits feeling drawn to the Fontenelle text and empowered by the sex of the *Marquiese*: "*I thought an* English *Woman might adventure to translate any thing a* French *Woman may be supposed to have spoken*" (sig. A4r). She praises the Frenchman for making philosophy available to women but objects to his treatment of the Lady, who is presented alternatively as ignorant or as capable of the most sophisticated arguments. Behn shows an acute sensitivity to questions of gender: she thus consistently substitutes "men and women" for "men." In so doing, she can be considered a radical forerunner of the Enlightenment, by officially introducing women into a philosophical and scientific discourse from which they had hitherto been excluded.

5. Conclusion

Behn thus perfectly illustrates the remarkable versatility of what "translation" could mean in the period, and how it could be put to use: far from being a menial or commercial job, and although the economic question was never far from her concerns, it was for her in the best of cases a fecund intellectual re-creation or co-creation. In the preface to *The Luckey Chance*, she famously voiced her literary ambition, claiming for herself the "Priviledge for [her] Masculine Part the Poet in [her]" to "tread in those successful Paths [her] Predecessors so long thriv'd in":

> [...] to take those Measures that both the Ancient and Modern Writers have set me [...] If I must not, because of my Sex, have this Freedom, but that you will usurp all to your selves; I lay down my Quill [...] I value Fame as much as if I had been born a *Hero*; and if you rob me of that, I can retire from the ungrateful World, and scorn its fickle Favours. (1687, sig. ar)

Behn clearly extended this literary ambition to her work as a translator. But not content to *follow* in her predecessors' paths, she triumphantly asserted "her Masculine Part, the Translator" in her: first by quietly, but authoritatively, asserting the translator's dignity in "The Translator's Preface" (as reflected in the non gender-specific title). Then she did so by proving that a woman could be as great a "Translator" as her male counterparts and that translating contemporary vernacular literature could be as worthy as translating the Classics — a modern writing for the moderns.

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Author's contact: line.cottegnies@sorbonne-universite.fr

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