

# Filologia

## Antica e Moderna

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RUBETTINO



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*FILOLOGIA ANTICA E MODERNA*  
*N.S. VI, 1 (XXXIV, 57), 2024*

**Articoli**

- 7 **Yole Deborah Bianco**  
*Il confine del Cristo di Levi. Sconfinamenti a Sud di ogni margine*
- 23 **Sabrina Caiola**  
*Simbologie della soglia nei Promessi sposi di Alessandro Manzoni: Renzo tra Porta Orientale e Porta Nuova*
- 39 **Giacomo Carmagnini**  
*Adattare la propria veste: gli 'universalismi locali' del costituzionalismo rivoluzionario*
- 53 **Maria Cristina Caruso**  
*Immagini del futuro nella letteratura del Caribe Ispano degli anni 2000*
- 69 **Mariafrancesca Cozzolino**  
*La memoria della clades Gallica e il paradigma dell'incendio opportuno*
- 85 **Dalila D'Alfonso**  
*'Sprezzature catulliane': lettura dei carmina 6, 10, 39*
- 99 **Emanuela De Luca**  
*Una nota a Tib. 1, 6, 10*
- 103 **Adelaide Fongoni**  
*La poetica di Teleste di Selinunte fra tradizione e innovazione*
- 133 **Antonio Martina**  
*L'eredità classica nella Grecia Salentina*
- 215 **Biancamaria Masutti**  
*Onorio oltre il Rubicone: un antico confine nella poesia di Claudiano*
- 233 **Luca Palombo**  
*La scelta dell'ausiliare dei verbi servili con l'infinito essere: tra norma e uso*

- Anastasia Parise**  
241 *The Paratext and the Translatress: Aphra Behn against Stereotypes of Genre and Gender*
- Domenico Passarelli**  
259 *Il rumore che fanno i mostri: identità liminali, lessico dei suoni e strategie antropopietiche nel libro nono dell’Odissea*
- Andrea Saputo**  
269 *Il PCI, i confini e i limiti di una “questione morale”: la relazione taciuta tra Togliatti e Iotti*
- Federica Sconza**  
279 *L’epitafio negato: memorie saffiche e altre osservazioni su Prop. 2, 11*

Anastasia Parise

## The Paratext and the Translatress: Aphra Behn against Stereotypes of Genre and Gender

### I.

Whereas in the past prefaces and translations were usually considered ‘liminal’ and secondary elements that little added to the ‘main’ text, their role as primary spaces of cultural production and theoretical reflection is now being thoroughly revised and acknowledged by scholars and publishing houses alike. This paper is centred on the early modern writer and translatress Aphra Behn (1640-1689), and more specifically on her preface to and translation of Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686)<sup>1</sup>. The analysis of the paratext is based on Kathryn Batchelor’s<sup>2</sup> methodology, while the translation is examined through Silvia Kadiu’s<sup>3</sup> reflexive approach. The purpose is to demonstrate how the practice of translation and its paratextual elements were means through which early modern women writers could reclaim their agency and challenge the hegemonic and patriarchal norms of their time.

The majority of 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century translatresses turned to translation because it offered them shelter from the accusations of licentiousness that came along with writing and publishing original texts, since it was be-

<sup>1</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686.

<sup>2</sup> K. Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> S. Kadiu, *Reflexive Translation Studies*, London, UCL Press, 2019.

lieved to be a way of seeking public, and hence male, attention. Pioneering scholars such as Tina Krontiris<sup>4</sup> and Sherry Simon<sup>5</sup> have pointed out not only how women were often silenced, but also how their intellectual activity was mostly limited to translating religious works. Other genres were not seen as safe endeavours for translatresses, who felt obliged to constantly legitimise themselves when dealing with them. Nonetheless, evidence of female agency is increasingly found in the translation of political, philosophical or scientific texts, making it finally possible to answer Simon's doubts of «whether translation condemned women to the margins of discourse or, on the contrary, rescued them from imposed silence. Are we to understand that translation remained a totally marginal form of activity, “adding” nothing to the intellectual circles into which it was introduced?»<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, neither translation nor translatresses were marginal, and a woman's agency was manifest in the choice of the text to translate and the way the translation was pursued, which was complemented by the addition of paratextual elements where her opinion on source and target texts could be expressed.

The case of Aphra Behn is even more striking since she defended herself from the prejudices of her time by declaring to be «forced to write for Bread and not ashamed to owne it»<sup>7</sup>. Whereas Behn is getting more and more recognition as one of the first professional women writers and proto-feminists in Britain who «allow[ed] women to desire and highlight[ed] how the repression of women can be compared to colonization»<sup>8</sup>, her role as a translator is still mostly overlooked by scholars. Accustomed to publishing original plays and novels, whenever she turned to translation for market reasons, Behn used the paratext to respond to critiques and comment on the texts she wrote or translated. As a matter of fact, the necessity for the translation to be swift and profitable is recognisable in

<sup>4</sup> T. Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices: Women as Writers and Translators of Literature in the English Renaissance*, London, Routledge, [1992] 1997.

<sup>5</sup> S. Simon, *Gender in Translation*, London, Routledge, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> A. Behn, *Sir Patient Fancy a comedy: as it is acted at the Duke's Theatre*, London, Printed by E. Flesher for Richard Tonson and Jacob Tonson, 1678, n.p.

<sup>8</sup> G. Cacciavilni, *Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, and Sylvia Plath: “a passionate journey” towards “a revolution in female manners”*, “Coolabah”, Vol. 4, Australian Studies Centre, Universidad de Barcelona, pp. 3-8, 2010, p. 4.



*Entretiens* as well, both in the preface and the ‘Errata’, which reports: «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. The most material ones are under-written»<sup>9</sup>. Nonetheless, the lack of time that did not let her ‘supervise’ the first draft of her translation did not prevent her from writing as its preface what she defines a long ‘essay’.

## II.

Scholarly interest in paratextuality has been steadily increasing since the publication of Gérard Genette’s *Seuils*<sup>10</sup>, in which the different kinds of elements surrounding a text were classified and systematised for the first time. The contributions by Guyda Armstrong<sup>11</sup>, Chiara Elefante<sup>12</sup>, Belle and Hosington<sup>13</sup> and Kathryn Batchelor<sup>14</sup> are among the seminal studies that build on Genette’s pioneering work. The latter, in particular, revises his categories and designs a specialised paradigm to fit into translation studies. Indeed, the fact that Genette did not focus on this discipline led to inconsistencies when his theory was applied with no revisions. The French structuralist considered translations as paratextual elements of their source texts and, thus, classified prefaces written by translators as ‘allographic’ (i.e. not written by the original author of the text), and ‘later’ (i.e. not written at the same time as the text). Nevertheless, he bestowed a different status on a translators’ preface if it is self-reflective, i.e. when it is about the translation itself, in which case it ceases to be allographic. These differences are not included in Batchelor’s paradigm, according to which

<sup>9</sup> A. Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

<sup>10</sup> G. Genette, *Seuils*, Paris, Seuil (Kindle edition), 1987.

<sup>11</sup> G. Armstrong, ‘Paratexts and their Functions in Seventeenth-Century English ‘Decameron’, “The Modern Language Review”, No. 1, pp. 40-57, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> C. Elefante, *Traduzione e paratesto*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> M-A. Belle, and B. M. Hosington, *Thresholds of Translation. Paratexts, Print, and Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Britain (1473-1660)*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

<sup>14</sup> K. Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018.

[a] paratext is a consciously crafted threshold for a text which has the potential to influence the way(s) in which the text is received [...]. Crucially, a text may be in its original language or it may be translated; in other words, in this model a translated text would be considered a text in its own right and with its own paratexts, as opposed to being viewed as a paratext to an original text, as in Genette's model<sup>15</sup>.

Such broader definition of the paratext and the evolution of the status of translated texts are the primary grounds on which Batchelor's model lies. Every translator's preface is thus 'authorial' (i.e. written by the same author of the text) and classified according to the temporal labels assigned to the preface on the basis of when it was written. For instance, Aphra Behn's preface to her translation of *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* is 'with-T.T.' (i.e. it appeared in and was written for the first publication of the translation). Moreover, since Behn addresses both her translation and the practice of translation in general, the preface is what Batchelor defines a 'paratext' (i.e. a threshold to the text), a 'metatext' (i.e. a commentary on the specific text) and a 'metadiscourse' (i.e. a commentary on translation as a phenomenon). The scholar makes relevant distinctions about senders and addressees that are particularly useful in translation studies since they can combine in different ways<sup>16</sup>. As for Behn, the sender is the translator and the addressees are the readers of the target text<sup>17</sup>.

In her revision, Batchelor redefines the functions of the paratext as well. If we were to apply Genette's taxonomy<sup>18</sup> to Behn's preface, they would be: ensuring and guiding the proper reading of the text (as Behn explains her translation choices); giving value to the text without overtly

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>16</sup> The sender can be the author of the source text, the translator, the editor of the source text, the editor of the target text, etc.; the addressee can be the reader of the source text, the reader of the target text, the author of the source text, the author of the target text, etc.

<sup>17</sup> This is to be referred exclusively to the preface to her translation of *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. The paratextual material prefixed to this text contains an insightful dedication as well, whose sender is still Aphra Behn and the addressee is «the Right Honourable, William, Earl of Drumlangrig, Eldest Son to his Grace, William, Duke of Queensberry; and one of his Majesty's most Honourable Privy-Council in the Kingdom of Scotland» (A. Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.).

<sup>18</sup> G. Genette, *Seuils*, Paris, Seuil (Kindle edition), 1987, pos. 4462-5400.

giving it to the author (which Behn does by appraising the author of the source text, even though he is also criticised for his many errors); giving value to the text by stressing its truthfulness (since Behn corrects the author's scientific mistakes); defining the genre of the text (which is here notably significant as science was deemed unsuitable for women). Batchelor draws her technical functions from Annika Rockenberger's<sup>19</sup> study on video games and specifically adapts them to translation studies. According to her model, Behn's preface is referential, self-referential, generic, meta-communicative, informative, hermeneutical, ideological, and instructive/operational. The first function regards the identification of the text and its context of reception in both source and target cultures. This can be recognised in the translatress' critique of the text and in her positioning it as a renowned literary work in both countries<sup>20</sup>. The self-referentiality to the preface appears in the choice of providing it with a title and in the instances in which she refers to «this Preface» or «this Essay»<sup>21</sup>. The categorisation of the text as a scientific translation fulfils the generic function. The meta-communicative one is detectable in Behn's metatextual comments about her translation process, which entail also the informative and hermeneutical functions in the explanations of the adopted terminology and necessary rewritings<sup>22</sup>. The ideological function is noticeable when the translatress distances herself from some of the source text ideals and statements. In this way, Aphra Behn directly affects the reception of the translation since the reader is able to discern Fontenelle's stance from her own (i.e. the instructive/operational function).

<sup>19</sup> A. Rockenberger, *Video Game Framings*. In «Examining Paratextual Theory and its Applications in Digital Culture», edited by Nadine Desrochers and Daniel Apollon, Hershey, IGI Global, pp. 252-286, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> «The General Applause this little Book of the Plurality of Worlds has met with, both in *France* and *England* in the Original, made me attempt to translate it into English» (A. Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> As a matter of fact, in the definition of the informative and hermeneutical functions Batchelor includes the clarification of «culture-specific references to a new audience» and the «explanation of the text's characteristics as a result of authorial decision» (K. Batchelor, *Translation and Paratexts*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 160).

## III.

Aphra Behn's preface to her translation of *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* was written in occasion of its first publication in 1688, two years after the source text, and can be divided into three parts: (1) language and translation; (2) natural philosophy and religion; (3) the translation of *Entretiens*<sup>23</sup>. First of all, it has to be emphasised that Behn wrote the preface as an 'Essay on Translated Prose', as stated in the title page, which informs the reader that the translation is introduced by «a preface, by way of Essay on Translated Prose; wherein the Arguments of Father *Tacquet*, and others, against the System of *Copernicus* (as to the Motion of the Earth) are likewise considered, and answered: Wholly new»<sup>24</sup>. By presenting the preface as an essay, the translator gives value to the paratextual element of the translation, but, above all, she immediately sites her text in a broader discourse on translation, as she promptly acknowledges: «give me leave to say something of Translation of Prose in general: As for Translation of Verse, nothing can be added to that Incomparable Essay of the late Earl of *Roscommon*»<sup>25</sup>. Roberta Falcone<sup>26</sup> compares the texts prefixed to Behn's translation of La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes* and *Entretiens* as follows:

Nel primo [...] la scrittrice si firma "Astrea", dichiarando, dunque, che il traduttore è appunto una donna; in *The Translator's Preface* si definisce, al contrario, un traduttore, pur essendo la parola *translatress* già entrata nell'Oxford Dictionary (1638) [...]. Nascondendosi dietro a un traduttore asessuato, ella vuole farsene dare autorevolezza alla sua parola per potersi porre sullo stesso piano di Roscommon: l'autore inglese ha trattato esaustivamente della traduzione in versi, mentre lei si assume il compito di farlo per la prosa<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> This is not to be considered as a clear-cut division since all the parts intertwine.

<sup>24</sup> A. Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>26</sup> R. Falcone, *Aphra Behn: traduttore o traduttrice?*, in O. Palusci (ed), *Traduttrici: Questioni di gender nelle letterature in lingua inglese*, Liguori, Napoli, 2010, pp. 23-35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26. On this topic, see also R. Falcone, *The Art of Translation in the Works of Aphra Behn*, in A. Lamamarra e B. Dhucicq (eds), *Aphra Behn in/and Our Time*, Les Editions d'En Face, Paris, 2008, pp. 130-150.

Although Behn's translations have often been overlooked when it comes to explaining her extraordinary defiance of gender norms and restrictions in her other writings, in this preface and in the actual translation she challenges the patriarchal dogma that would see a woman unfit to deal with scientific texts and topics. The issue of being a woman is briefly addressed in the dedication to the Earl of Drumlangrig, where she uses it as a justification for errors in the translation («if it is not done with that exactness it merits, I hope your Lordship will pardon it in a *Woman*»<sup>28</sup>). This rhetorical strategy is as common in early modern women writers as it is completely out of character for Behn, demonstrating, as Sarah Goodfellow points out, «that she was not only aware of her anomalous presence as a learned lady in a masculine discipline, but was also adept at manipulating her perceived gender status»<sup>29</sup>. Behn probably exploits this rhetoric to gain public sympathy, and this can be confirmed by a subtle addition she makes in her translation. One of the characters explains that the moon's surface is covered with lakes, mountains, forests, and, above all, a valley where one could find the many things lost on the earth<sup>30</sup>, such as crowns, fame, hopes, the time lost writing verses *and dedications* – adds Behn – to be presented to princes<sup>31</sup>: this may be read

<sup>28</sup> A. Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

<sup>29</sup> S. Goodfellow, «*Such Masculine Strokes*»: *Aphra Behn as Translator of "A Discovery of New Worlds"*, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 229-250, 1996, p. 230.

<sup>30</sup> The narrator echoes the episode about Astolfo on the moon in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, quoting also a couple of verses («*qui montera aux cieus, ma belle, pour en rapporter l'esprit que vos charmes m'ont fait perdre? ... etc.*»), B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 509), which Behn expands with many more: «That I ought to cause one to mount the Heavens, my fair one, to make me recover the Sense your Charms have made me lose, yet I will not complain of this Loss, provided it does not go too far, but if there be a Necessity that your Cruelties must continue, as they have begun, I have no more to do but to expect just such a Fate as *Orlando's*; however I do not believe, that to recover my Senses 'tis requisite I go through the Air to the Moon; my Soul does not lodge so high; it wanders about your fair Eyes, and Mouth; and if you will be pleas'd to give me leave to take it, permit me to recover it with my Lips» (Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, 52).

<sup>31</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 498; Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, 58.

as a hint at the time she lost writing the dedication. Nonetheless, the translatress did not seek only general approval, as already noted, but also, and more importantly, she subtly condemned women's education, which did not include scientific subjects. The Earl has to pardon the mistakes a woman may make, because *as* a woman she was «not supposed to be well versed in the Terms of Philosophy, being but a new beginner in that Science»<sup>32</sup>. As a matter of fact, she shows an unapologetic attitude in the preface/essay, since, even before addressing the practice of translation, she explains in the first lines that Fontenelle introduces a «Woman as one of the speakers in these five Discourses, [...] I thought an *English* Woman might adventure to translate any thing a *French* Woman may be supposed to have spoken»<sup>33</sup>. These are the only words she spends on the matter in the preface, which appears as a simple statement rather than an excuse: «If you can read a novel, you can read philosophy (especially such philosophy as this, which is more like science fiction than Aristotle); if I can do it, you can too. These are the propositions by which Behn demystifies masculine learning for the new ranks of educated middle-class women in her day»<sup>34</sup>. After this short and sharp introduction, Behn moves to the main topics of the *Essay* by examining issues regarding language and translation, stating that French is the language

most remote from the *Latin*, so the Phrase and Accent differ most from the *English*: It may be, it is more agreeable with the *Welsh*, which is near a-kin to the *Basbritton* and *Biscagne* Languages, which is derived from the old *Celtick* Tongue, the first that was spoken amongst the Ancient *Gauls*, who descended from the *Celts*. The *French* therefore is of all the hardest to translate into *English*<sup>35</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French*, made English by A. Behn, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> D. Robinson, *Theorizing in a Woman's Voice: Subversions of the Rhetoric of Patronage, Courtly Love, and Morality by Early Modern Women Translators*, "The Translator", Issue 1, No. 2, pp. 153-75, 1995, p. 171.

<sup>35</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French*, made English by A. Behn, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

Leaving aside the philological remarks that can be easily contested today, Behn goes on listing the other ‘proofs’ and ‘reasons’ she has for regarding the translation from French into English as the most difficult one. For example, the former is distant from English in genius and humour and has undergone many changes over the last centuries. Moreover, French-speaking writers «take a liberty to borrow whatever Word they want from the *Latin*, without farther Ceremony, especially when they treat of Sciences [and] confound their own Language with needless Repetitions and Tautologies»<sup>36</sup>. This section ends with the declaration of having «endeavoured to give you the true meaning of the Author, and have kept as near his Words as was possible; I was necessitated to add a little in some places, otherwise the Book could not have been understood»<sup>37</sup>.

Thereafter, she continues with the second part of the preface, in which she discusses natural philosophy and religion, explaining first and foremost how Fontenelle «hath failed in his Design; for endeavouring to render this part of Natural Philosophy familiar, he hath turned it into Ridicule»<sup>38</sup>. Behn writes a full critique of the author’s inaccuracies in his text (which are thoroughly discussed by Line Cottegnies<sup>39</sup>), the more significant one being the exclusion of God from his dialogues. In the very last section of her 25-page essay, she concludes «with some few Lines, as to my present Translation» stating that she has «translated the Book near the Words of the Author», although she has «made bold to correct a Fault of the *French Copy*»<sup>40</sup>. Nonetheless, the last line of the essay stresses once more that her translation is ‘faithful’ to Fontenelle: «I resolv’d either to give you the *French Book* into *English*, or to give you the subject quite changed and made my own; but having neither health nor leisure for the last I offer you the first such as it is»<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> L. Cottegnies, *The Translator as Critic: Aphra Behn’s Translation of Fontenelle’s “Discovery of New Worlds” (1688)*, “Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700”, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 23-38, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*.

To summarise, when Behn discusses her translation, she always begins by underlining that the meaning and the words are those of the French author, even though every statement of the sort is immediately followed by explanations of her interventionist approach. However, she concludes the essay by claiming that her translation is literal, making it clear that she did not make the subject her own, which is something that can be assessed thanks to a reflexive translation analysis.

#### IV.

Aiming to evaluate the coherence between Behn's statements about her translation in the preface/essay and her actual practice, the analysis of the translation has followed the reflexive approach theorised by Silvia Kadiu<sup>42</sup>, according to which «theorising takes place during the translation process itself, in the act of undertaking a translation and attempting to articulate our experience of it, of facing a translation dilemma and reflecting on possible solutions»<sup>43</sup>. Scholars have pointed out that «Behn's translation of Fontenelle is extremely literal, as Behn herself makes clear in her preface. She limits her interventions into the text to the few announced in her preface»<sup>44</sup>, which regard specifications and corrections about natural philosophy subjects:

I have used all along the *Latin Word Axis*, which is *Axle-tree* in *English*, which I did not think so proper a Word in a Treatise of this nature; but 'tis what is generally understood by every Body. There is another Word in the two last *Nights*, which was very uneasy to me, and the more so for that it was so often repeated, which is *Tourbillion*, which signifies commonly a *Whirl-wind*; but Monsieur *Des Chartes* understands it in a more general sense, and I call it a *Whirling*; the Author hath given a very good Definition of it, and I need say no more, but that I retain the Word unwillingly, in regard of what I have said in the beginning of this Preface [...]. I have made bold to correct a Fault of the *French Copy*, as to the heighth of our Air

<sup>42</sup> S. Kadiu, *Reflexive Translation Studies*, London, UCL Press, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>44</sup> M. Agorni, *The voice of the 'Translatress': From Aphra Behn to Elizabeth Carter*, "The Yearbook of English-Studies", Vol. 28, pp. 181-195, 1998, p. 187.



or Sphere of Activity of the Earth, which the *French Copy* makes twenty or thirty Leagues, I call it two or three, because sure this was a Fault of the Printer, and not a mistake of the Author. For Monsieur *Des Cartes*, and Monsieur *Rohalt*, both assert it to be but two or three Leagues. I thought *Paris* and *St. Denis* fitter to be made Monsieur *Rohalt* use of as Examples, to compare the Earth and the Moon to, than *London* and *Greenwich*; because *St. Denis* having several Steeples and Walls, is more like *Paris*, than *Greenwich* is to *London*. *Greenwich* has no Walls, and but one very low Steeple, not to be seen from the Monument without a Prospective Glass<sup>45</sup>.

Behn mentions the use of the more scientifically accurate Latin word *Axis* instead of the English *Axle-tree*, and of *Whirling* instead of *Whirlwind* to translate *Tourbillion*, in accordance with Descartes's use of the term. She corrects the height of the sphere of activity of the earth and the example used to compare the surface of the earth to that of the moon. She justifies these choices by explaining them and reporting the scientific literature in her favour, citing Descartes and Rohalt, which testifies to her eagerness to present a flawless text, whether or not in accordance with its source. However, her interventions are not limited to those mentioned above<sup>46</sup>, as in general the translatress often mitigates the strong naivety which characterises the Marchioness, one of the main characters in the *Essay*, portraying her as more genuinely interested and eager to learn; often adds adjectives to strengthen descriptions; frequently specifies what is indefinite and unclear in the source text, and corrects wrong statements about natural philosophy; inserts some hints at political and religious issues. The only interventions Behn acknowledges in the preface regard corrections/specifications of astronomy-related issues. However, the ones she mentions are not the only changes she makes as there are at least

<sup>45</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Two of the most noticeable interventions are the change of the title from *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* to *A Discovery of New Worlds* instead of the more literal 'Discourses on the plurality of worlds', and the omissions of chapter titles. The former shifts the focus from the genre and organisation of the book, which is divided into five nights mostly made of reported speeches between the narrator and a Marchioness, to the argument of the speeches, which is the discovery of new – and not only 'many' – worlds; while the latter seems to be a purely typographic choice.

five more examples that can be discussed. The first one takes place in a description of the Earth's orbit:

«Dans le temps que [la terre] avance sur le cercle qu'elle décrit en un autour du soleil, elle tourne sur elle-mesme en vingt-quatre heures. Ainsi en vingt-quatre heures chaque partie de la terre perd le soleil, et le recouvre»<sup>47</sup>.

«In the time it advances on the Circle it makes round the Sun, in its yearly Course, it turns over once every four and twenty Hours, upon its own Axis; so that in that space of time, which is one natural Day, every point of the Earth (which is not near the South or North-Poles) loses and recovers the sight of the Sun»<sup>48</sup>.

The target text is slightly longer than its source because Behn inserts two sentences, i.e. «which is one natural Day» and «which is not near the South or North-Poles». Although the former may be seen as an avoidable clarification, the latter is more than that, namely a specification that enhances the scientific accuracy of the text, as are the remaining ones. Behn specifies that the light of the moon rebounds not only upon any solid body («sur ce qui est solide»<sup>49</sup>), but on that «which is opaque, or obscure»<sup>50</sup>. Furthermore, not only do the 'little balls' composing the light pass in «ligne droite»<sup>51</sup>, but it also has to be «Diaplanus, or clear»<sup>52</sup>. The translator also believes it would be preferable to specify that «the Sphere of the fixed Stars, turns round, and carries with it the Planets one way, from East to West, round the Sun, which is plac'd in the Centre»<sup>53</sup>, adding the direction

<sup>47</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 235.

<sup>48</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, p. 29.

<sup>49</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 372.

<sup>50</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, p. 44.

<sup>51</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 373.

<sup>52</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, p. 44.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

of its movement<sup>54</sup>. The last one is about the exact number of the moons of Saturn, where Fontenelle's «Saturne avec les siennes [lunes]»<sup>55</sup> becomes «Saturn with the five [moons] that belong to him»<sup>56</sup>; moreover, later on, she adds that «two of the five [moons] are discover'd very lately»<sup>57</sup>.

A couple of examples of political discourse are the additions of «time lost in waiting and depending on promising states-men»<sup>58</sup> within the list of the things lost on the earth that can be found on the moon, and «slavery»<sup>59</sup> in the explanation of human inclinations. Regarding the former, the additions do not seem casual, but rather act as a critique of politics and the way society works, which entails time lost writing dedications to princes and depending and waiting on statesmen. As for slavery, it could be an easily undetected way to criticise the practice ahead of her time. Behn's translation of *Entretiens* is also characterised by a subtle but discernible proto-feminist approach, where the source text is changed and made fitter to the ideal of equality between the sexes. There are two main examples that can be here discussed. The first is a sort of rewriting of the source text in the original dedication of the book:

«D'avoir ouvert les yeux sur des livres; cela n'est rien, et bien des gens l'ont fait toute leur vie, à qui je refuserois, si j'osois, le nom de sçavans»<sup>60</sup>.

«Perhaps you will be apt to say, that her Sex must needs be wanting in those Perfections which adorn ours, because they do not read so much. But what signifies

<sup>54</sup> «Etoile fixes, tourne en rond, en emportant avec soy les planetes, les fait tourner toutes en un mesme sens autour du soleil, qui occupe le centre» (B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 970).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, pos. 1074.

<sup>56</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, p. 122.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>58</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 529; Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 536; Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, p. 62.

<sup>60</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 20.

the reading of so many vast Volumes over, since there are a great many Men who have made that the Business of their whole Lives, to whom, if I durst, I wou'd scarce allow the Knowledge of any thing?»<sup>61</sup>.

Whereas Fontenelle is talking about the character of the Marchioness in particular, Behn synecdochically shifts the focus from the single woman to women in general, to 'her sex'. This could be interpreted as a critique of women's education, especially if taking into consideration Behn's own dedication as well. The second is the translation of «des hommes» as «men and women»<sup>62</sup>, where Behn disregards an allegedly inclusive male form and rather includes women. These are only some of the examples of interventions that can be found in Behn's translation of *Entretien* in which the translator manipulates the source text and makes it clear that women are not unfit at all to the scientific genre since a woman herself can and has translated a scientific text by paying attention to the accuracy of the author's statements and correcting them when needed.

## V.

Aphra Behn's interventionist approach in translation and her active use of the paratext are not isolated instances, and *Entretien sur la pluralité des mondes* is neither the first nor the last case. As a matter of fact, Janet Todd<sup>63</sup> considers her rendition of François de La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*<sup>64</sup> as «a fairly literal translation of the French text although she occasionally replaces specific French allusions with an English equivalent. Her most radical transformation of the text lies in her reordering of the sequence of the *Maximes*, creating

<sup>61</sup> Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, n.p.

<sup>62</sup> B. le B. de Fontenelle, *Entretien sur la pluralité des mondes*, Une Œuvre du Domaine Public, 1686, pos. 529; Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688, p. 61.

<sup>63</sup> J. Todd (ed.), *Seneca Unmasked and other Translations*, "The Works of Aphra Behn", Vol. 4, London/New York, Routledge, 2016 [1993].

<sup>64</sup> A. Behn, *Seneca unmasked. A Bilingual Edition of Aphra Behn's Translation of La Rochefoucauld's Maximes*, New York, AMS Press, 2001.

her own, more personal meditations on Love and Self-Love»<sup>65</sup>. Moreover, Behn uses the peritextual space to reflect on ethics, as in *Entretiens* she comments on ‘natural philosophy’. Another insightful example is her translation of *Histoire des Oracles*<sup>66</sup> by Fontenelle, to which is prefaced a long reflection on the subject and her translation practice. Her stance seems here quite different from her declarations in *Entretiens*:

I laid-by the thoughts of translating, and thought it would be better, preserving the Foundation and principal Matter of the Work, to give it altogether another Form. And I confess, that no Man can extend this Liberty farther than I have done; for I have changed the whole Disposition of the Book, and have retrenched whatever appeared to me, either of too little Profit in it self, or of too little Pleasure to make amends for that little profit. I have not only added all the Ornaments I could think of, but many things which prove or clear up what is in Question upon the same Subject and the same Passages, which Mr. *Van-Dale* furnished me withal. I argue sometimes in a manner contrary to his, and I have not been scrupulous to insert many Reasons wholly my own: In fine, I have new cast and modelled the whole Work<sup>67</sup>.

Bearing in mind such declarations in favour of ‘taking liberties’ in the translation process, it comes as no surprise that Douglas Robinson includes Behn in his *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche* as one of the nine (!) women in the anthology, noting that «Behn’s most important work on translation, however, lies not in the ‘Essay’ [...] but in the prefaces, especially in the tonal ease with which she dismisses ancient demands of translational fidelity»<sup>68</sup>. This is the reason why also these works would benefit from the joint approach outlined in this paper. This kind of analysis may lead to the revision of the taken-for-granted assumption that Alexander Tytler’s *Essay on the*

<sup>65</sup> J. Todd (ed.), *Seneca Unmasked and other Translations*, “The Works of Aphra Behn”, Vol. 4, London/New York, Routledge, 2016 [1993], n.p.

<sup>66</sup> A. Behn, *The History of Oracles, and the Cheats of the Pagan Priests in two parts*, London, 1688.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>68</sup> D. Robinson, *Western Translation Theory from Herodotus to Nietzsche*, London, Routledge, 2015, p. 181.

*Principles of Translation*<sup>69</sup> (1791) is the first important theoretical treatise on translation in Britain. The debate on translation practices was already fertile a century earlier, as the *Essay on Translated Verse*<sup>70</sup> (Earl of Roscommon, 1684) and the *Essay on Translated Prose*<sup>71</sup> (Aphra Behn, 1688) testify to.

Moreover, if we take into consideration the statements found in the paratextual elements related to the translations of the early modern period, we see that the discussion is actually much more productive than it was previously thought. Tytler's *Essay* may remain the first *systematic* work on the practice of translation indeed, but taking into account these long-considered liminal texts reveals a more faceted history of translation theory that welcomes both women and men. In the meantime, even though in the preface to *A Discovery of New Worlds* Aphra Behn does not claim her interventions as much as she does in other paratexts, it is possible to question her statement about her translation being literal. A combined analysis of the paratext and the translation together highlights that she has rather 'made this scientific subject her own', defying stereotypes of genre and gender, which is further evidence that supposedly marginal texts, such as prefaces and translations, are instead central in making women acquire agency.

## Abstract

Since Gérard Genette's (1987) theorisation of the concept of the paratext, the analysis of paratextuality has gained considerable relevance in literary and translation studies aiming at thoroughly interpreting the socio-cultural functions of texts and the role of their translators (Elefante 2013, Batchelor 2018). Its examination is particularly fruitful in the process of re-evaluation of early modern age female translators, who found their voice in the textual margins of manuscripts and books. While the choice of what and how to translate was already a

<sup>69</sup> A. Tytler, *Essay on the Principles of Translation*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1907 [1791].

<sup>70</sup> W. D. Earl of Roscommon, *An essay on translated verse by the Earl of Roscomon*, London, Printed for Jacob Tonson, 1684.

<sup>71</sup> A. Behn, *A Discovery of New Worlds from the French, made English by A. Behn*, London, Printed for William Canning, 1688.

subtle but meaningful way of expressing themselves, their agency became even more powerful when they chose to operate at the peritextual level. In particular, prefaces offered women a space to articulate their thoughts on their work and the role their sex played in their endeavours.

This paper focuses on the early modern translatress Aphra Behn, and more specifically on her preface to the translation of Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes*. Behn used the peritextual space to comment on the source and target texts, as well as on the reasons why she undertook the translation of a genre usually deemed unsuitable to women, i.e. the scientific text (Cottegnies 2003), believing she is apt to translate the text because Fontenelle's main character is actually a woman. The paratext will be analysed from a reflexive translation perspective (Kadiu, 2019) so as to assess women's agency in the early modern age and measure her challenge to the hegemonic and patriarchal norms of their time.

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