KATARZYNA OCHMAN

TRANSLATION CRITICISM IN ANCIENT ROME. AULUS GELLIUS, *ATTIC NIGHTS*

Abstract: We owe many aspects of Western culture to the Greeks; yet it was the Romans who took the first steps in the field of translation. This article presents a selection of characteristics of translation methods used by the Ancients and, more particularly, their broad understanding of translation as exemplified by Aulus Gellius, Roman writer of the second century CE.

Keywords: antiquity, translation criticism, translation in ancient Rome, *imitatio*, *aemulatio*, Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, Aulus Gellius

Presentations of the history of translation usually begin with a discussion of antiquity.[1] Small wonder: various aspects of our civilisation go back to antiquity, with the necessity and the practice of translation – and theoretical speculation thereupon – being no exception. Yet unlike much else in our culture that owes its genesis to the Greeks, here we need go back no further than Roman times.[2] The Greeks, it is true, knew the institution of the oral translator and they did translate various documents, yet these were all strictly utilitarian translations that appeared with international contacts. Not one literary translation has been preserved from the Greek Ancient and

---

[1] Cf. among others Bassnett (2002: 47–53), who begins her chronological discussion of translation theory with a chapter on the Romans. She quotes E. Jacobsen, who once described translation as "a Roman invention." Venuti (2000: 4) proposes the ten most-quoted "translation theorists" in literature; the first half of his list is occupied by Cicero, Horace, Quintilian, Augustine and Jerome.

[2] A very readable and inspiring discussion of translation history before Roman times can be found in an article by Herbert Myśliwiec (1985). A systematic survey of translatorial artefacts and issues in the function of translation in the cultures of Greece, Egypt and the Middle East is provided by the encyclopaedia *Der neue Pauly* s.v. "Übersetzung" (Binder 2002: 1180–1184).

Classical periods.[3] Despite their numerous contacts with Eastern civilisations, the literary culture of the Hellenes seemed quite impervious to the influence of *hoi bárbaroi* – those who did not speak Greek.

Not so the Romans. They perceived value in other peoples' heritages, adopting and adapting them for their own purposes. Their contact with the riches of Greek civilisation was an endless source of inspiration, sparking multifaceted cultural development. Indeed, Roman literature is said to have begun with translation. The *Odyssey* was translated into Latin by Livius Andronicus in the third century BCE. He was also the first Greek author to adapt Greek drama into Latin and to present it to Roman audiences. Society's demand for this kind of literature is associated with Rome's political expansion. Soldiers returning home from their military service wanted entertainment they had seen in the Greek cities of the Italian Peninsula (Baker 2001: 495). This coincided with the rising numbers of Greek slaves in Rome, including Livius Andronicus himself, who hailed from the Southern Italian city of Tarentum. Kaimio (1979: 213) presents a highly interesting list of nineteen artists active in Rome between 240 and 140 BCE, complete with their origins, native tongues, social status and preferred literary genre. This list shows an interesting correlation between the writer's humble origins (and thus non-Latin native language) and dramatic work based on Greek models, though produced in Latin for the benefit of a Latin-speaking public. These adaptations (rather than translations) of Greek plays had a chiefly utilitarian function: they presented the content of the plays to an audience mostly unfamiliar with the language of the original. This fact was soon to change.

As observed by Rener (1989: 295), the Romans realised the deficiency of their language when they came in contact with the Greeks:[4] Greek authors boast of more knowledge than the Romans; but even more importantly, theirs was a style of linguistic communication that had been evolving over many generations. Their works of scholarship, poetry and rhetoric were attractive and elegant, well worthy of imitation. Interestingly, none of these genres saw an influx of translation into Latin that was in any way

---

[3] *Periplus* by the Carthaginian Hanno, translated from the Punic, is the sole exception. It consists of a several-page description of a sea voyage off the African coast. While the voyage itself took place in early sixth or fifth century BCE, the translation of its description might have been made at a later date.

[4] As late as in the first century BCE, Lucretius notes *patrii sermonis egestas*, "poverty of vocabulary in the native tongue."

similar to the Greek drama. Yet the Romans began to hire veritable throngs of Greek tutors to help them learn Greek, study Greek literature and use it to enrich their own language and culture. Translation (from Greek into Latin and vice versa) played a major part in education and was treated as an introduction and a preparation to writing new texts. Students translated all manner of texts, including poetry, to increase their vocabulary and their general erudition. Writing poems was, in fact, part of any student's curriculum, so that every educated Roman came in contact with poetic technique; many amateurs produced poetry throughout their lives, often as paraphrases or imitations of Greek pieces.

By the first century BCE, the Romans were functioning in a thoroughly bilingual environment. This blend of Greek and Latin cultures is now mainly visible in literature. Translation was no longer a communicative necessity. By the second century BCE, Latin became the Greeks' official language, but many used it just as often outside of official communicative.[5] Romans, too, began learning Greek at a very early age, even before they could read Latin. The idea was that a boy would learn Latin one way or another anyway, so the educational system imposed a second language on early learners. The literary translations produced under such circumstances were no longer aimed at informing the reader of the content of Greek works. The fact that they continued to appear shows that they must have had other functions.

This brings us to one of the main issues of ancient literary culture, which also sheds light on the question of translation: the opposition and the complementariness of the tendency to imitate (*imitari*) and to compete (*aemulari*) with one's predecessors. Both approaches to existing literature became particularly important to Roman authors in the first century BCE.[6] If Virgil borrows generously from Homer, Hesiod or Theocritus, he does so to match their literary skills on the one hand and, on the other, to show that

---

[5] See, for example, Gellius' *Attic Nights* 19.9.7, where some Greeks are described as "very well acquainted with our (i.e. Latin) literature." The passage is quoted by Adams (2003: 15–17), who provides a further bibliography on the subject and offers an interesting sociolinguistic interpretation of the story.

[6] In his fascinating book on the history of Latin, J. Leonhardt (2009: 67–71) describes the above phenomenon from the point of view of language development and sees the Latin writers' relationship to Greek literature as "the most significant characteristic of the literary output of the years 60–10 BCE." This relationship was to change in later times, but *imitatio* and *aemulatio* remained the categories of evaluation of literary texts (cf. note 9 below).

he can do better than his Greek predecessors.[7] When Clausen discusses the correlations between Virgil's *Eclogues* and Theocritus' *Bucolics*, he adds some general remarks on Roman imitators:

> Intentional imitation (as distinguished from reminiscence, of which the poet may not have been aware) was not looked down on in antiquity, it was looked for. (…) Imitation may be taken as evidence both of a poet's confidence in himself and of his esteem for the poet he has chosen to imitate. His aim was not to reproduce but to improve on the original (Kenney, Clausen 1982: 308–309).

Aemulatio played a great part in various aspects of literary life, not just in translation. An intriguing instance of intercultural competition may be found in Cicero's letters. On completing his consulate in 63 BCE he wrote his reminiscences from his term of office in Greek and sent them to his master, Posidonius of Rhodes. He also asked Posidonius to produce a more beautiful report on the same theme on the basis of the original text. Posidonius replied that reading the memoir made him shy to undertake the assignment. It was with the greatest satisfaction that Cicero recounted this story to his friend Pomponius Atticus and concluded: "In a word, I have routed the Greeks."[8]

Aemulatio was a powerful factor in the Romans' approach to translation. Since Greek and Latin were understood by educated people, readers were perfectly able to compare both versions and thus decide which was better. This is why the Roman translator does nothing to conceal himself behind the text; rather, he takes pains to indicate his impact on the form of the work, his ways of bettering the original or his correction of its faults. The translation does not merely mirror the source Greek text in Latin. It does not replace the original; it functions independently of the original and on equal terms. This has been well described by Bassnett (2002: 52) when she writes:

> The translated text was read *through* (Bassnett's emphasis) the source text, in contrast to the way in which a monolingual reader can only approach the SL text through the TL version. For Roman translators, the task of transferring a text from language to language could be perceived as an exercise in compa-

---

[7] This issue has been lucidly discussed by Harrison (2007). He emphasises, in the context of Virgil's entire literary career, the poet's highly methodical and deliberate position in adapting Greek models.

[8] *Letters to Atticus*, 2.1.2, see Cicero (1899: 62).

rative stylistics, since they were freed from the exigencies of having to "make known" either the form or the content *per se*, and consequently did not need to subordinate themselves to the frame of the original.

She goes on to say that a good translator expected his reader to know the original. The quality of the translation was based on how creative the author of the Latin version was in his approach to the Greek source text.[9]

It should be emphasised here that the definition of "translation" was in flux in Antiquity. Latin itself possesses several terms for the act of translation: *vertere* (to turn), *mutare* (to change, to exchange), *Latine exprimere* (to express in Latin), *traducere* (to lead across), *transferre* (to move across)[10] and *interpretari* (to mediate).[11]

All of the above Latin terms share the metaphor of carrying across content from one language to another, which can be achieved in a variety of ways:

literal quotation – free paraphrase;

unconscious inspiration – conscious association;

slavish reproduction – creative transformation.[12]

In antiquity, anything that fit the above three scales was translation in the broad sense of the word.[13] This must be remembered, since ancient sources cited by scholars usually refer to those translations that are situated to the right of each of the above axes.

There is, after all, the famous statement by Cicero on his experience of translating speeches by Aeschines and Demosthenes into Latin: "I have not

---

[9] Cf. Vardi (1996: 500): "the rules and precepts of this doctrine [of *imitatio*], originally designed for those engaged in the creation of literary compositions, also came to be employed as evaluative criteria in the criticism of already published literary works."

[10] This verb is the source of the noun *translation* (literally, "carrying across"). In modern languages, apart from the obvious English "translation," the same structure is shared by the German *Übersetzung* and the Polish *przekład*.

[11] The term *interpretation* has also survived in modern languages; in Polish, however, another meaning of this Latin word dominates: *tłumaczyć* – "to explain."

[12] Cf. Homeyer (1965: 3156): "feste Grenzen zwischen Reminiszenz und bewußtem Anklingenlassen an Vorbild und Quelle, zwischen Zitat und Paraphrase, zwischen Nachbilden und Umschöpfen gab es nicht."

[13] The above categories could also be used to describe the relationship between two texts written in the same language. Vardi (1996: 502) is quite clear when he says: "Roman rhetorical theory does not distinguish between inter- and intra-lingual imitations." Modern scholars tend to select a special group of "translations" from among all the other ancient acts of *imitatio* for special consideration; yet this is only due to their adopted scope and goal of research rather than to genetic differences between these genres of ancient literary work.

translated them as a literal interpreter, but as an orator (…); in doing which I did not consider it necessary to render it word for word, but I have preserved the character and energy of the language throughout." He continues with the elaborate metaphor of how his aim was not to count out the words to the reader, "but rather to give him all their weight."[14] This metaphor must be connected with the earlier opposition of translator (*interpres*) and speaker (*orator*). The translator treats words as separate pieces and does not show his individuality – his role is only to enable readers to understand a foreign text. The orator, by contrast, is creative: he uses the text of the original to show off his own literary skill; he renders the weight, the content of words, but the literary form is his own doing.

Horace makes the same point when he says: "do not strive, as a faithful translator, to render texts word for word."[15] In fact this proposition does not refer to translation; it is part of a description of the writer's work on a literary work, such as a piece of drama which relates to familiar themes and is based on a foreign-language source. The author of such a work must not resemble a translator; he is to follow a different set of rules. This well-known quotation has a less frequently quoted continuation which is of equal import to the author's work: "You will not, as an imitator, leap down into a narrow space from where shame or the rules applying to the work forbid you to extricate your foot."[16] Thus the imitator should change the content of the original if it risks offending the principle of *decorum*, i.e. of stylistic uniformity. It is his duty and his right to correct his model.

Horace says nothing to clearly suggest competing with the original; yet a hundred years later, Quintilian calls a spade a spade, again in the context of adapting Greek orations: "But I would not have paraphrase (*paraphrasis*) restrict itself to the bare interpretation (*interpretatio*) of the original: its duty is rather to rival and vie (*aemulatio*) with the original in the expression of the same thoughts."[17] Quintilian is a teacher and so he speaks of *aemulatio* as a stylistic exercise for students of the oratory art; but *aemulatio* was also a source of intellectual entertainment, *otium litteratum*. In his beautiful letter to Fuscus, Pliny the Younger lists useful ways of spending time. All his proposals relate to literary work; translation from Greek into Latin and from Latin into Greek are listed first:

---

[14] *Treatise on the Best Style of Orators*, trans. C.D. Yonge, l. 14, see Cicero 1913.
[15] *Ars poetica*, ll. 133–134, mod. Jan Rybicki, see Horace (1995: 11).
[16] *Ibid*., ll. 134–135.
[17] *Institutio Oratoria* 10.5.5, see Quintilian (1968: 115).

You may sometimes venture to pick out and try to emulate the most shining passages of an author. Such a contest is, indeed, something bold; but as it passes in secret, it cannot be taxed with presumption. (…) In this manner the greatest orators, and the greatest men as well, used either to exercise or amuse themselves, or rather did both.[18]

One might say that, in ancient Rome, translation was treated as a separate literary genre (Beall 1997: 217). It was an ephemeral one with relatively few surviving examples since – as we might gather from Pliny's remarks alone – translations were occasionally written with no intent to publish. To obtain a clearer picture, one must include within this group of texts the recurring fragments of original Latin writing that can be seen as very faithful allusions to known passages from Greek works. Their analysis allows us to compare preserved theoretical approaches to translation with the actual translatorial practice.

Aulus Gellius is an ancient author who gives us information on Roman translations and their Greek originals. He lived in the second century CE, at a time when literature and literary studies were a veritable craze in Rome, as a popular and oft-discussed subject of conversation and as a source of intellectual entertainment. Gellius wrote a book entitled *Noctes Atticae*, or *Attic Nights*, which must have seemed quite original at the time. As he himself emphasises, the title was to connote Athens, which had again became an educational and cultural hotspot. *Attic Nights* is an instance of poikilographic literature,[19] very popular in Antiquity and now mostly lost. In his twenty books, Gellius reflects on literature, philosophy, history and language; he quotes interesting scholarly disputes he attended and books that inspired him. *Variatio* is his main structuring principle: the author takes pains not to bore his reader. The chapters are usually short; each page brings a new and interesting subject. The questions raised are mostly light-hearted and entertaining, set in an elegant and deliberate literary form. If one were to permit oneself a modern media simile, then *Attic Nights* is not unlike a brilliant blog by an erudite cosmopolite.

---

[18] *Letters*, 7.9., see Pliny 1915.

[19] Derived from Greek *poikílos*, "multihued," poikilography thus denotes "dappled literature," often referred to by the German term *Buntschriftstellerei* or the Latin *miscellanea*, although no satisfactory definition has been coined so far. In her "Per una morfologia della poikilographia antica," Krystyna Bartol (2005) proposes the Greek name and lists the characteristics of the poikilographic genre. Apart from Gellius' *Attic Nights*, surviving examples include *Varia Historia* and *De Natura Animalium* by Claudius Aelianus and *Naturalis Historia* by Pliny the Elder.

Gellius's work has enjoyed a wide readership and created a stir for many centuries. It was cherished by St. Augustine and found its way into Petrarch's *libri peculiars* – those the Italian poet would return to time after time. The Renaissance and Enlightenment fashion for Gellius manifested itself in a wealth of re-editions.[20] He was often quoted and readily imitated. At the end of the eighteenth century, when knowledge of Latin became less common, *Attic Nights* was enthusiastically translated into a multitude of languages, with six translations into French alone. As tastes and scholarly priorities changed in the nineteenth century, enthusiasm for Gellius waned to aloofness, disdain or even contempt, which still seems to be reflected by some encyclopaedias. It is only in the last three decades that *Attic Nights* has acquired more proponents and fans.[21] One of the reasons for the present heightened interest is that Gellius provides a vivid image of the multicultural literary community in Rome in mid second century CE; a careful reading of his work can provide answers on those aspects of ancient intellectual activity that have failed to arouse scholars' interest.

A dozen or so chapters of *Attic Nights* deal with questions that would now be described as translation criticism and theory (Gamberale 1969). Gellius compares translations or paraphrases with their originals; he is equally ready to point out errors and bestow praise, quoting authorities, considering word meaning and choice and, at times, presenting his own version of a Greek text. For the modern scholar, this is excellent material for a "first-hand" observation of the terms in which the Roman perceived the work of the translator, as well as for an analysis of the impact of theoretical statements on ancient translation technique. Thus, in Chapter IX of Book IX, Gellius quotes several "translations" by Virgil and uses comparative

---

[20] *Editio princeps* appeared in Rome as early as in 1469, with eight editions before the end of the century. Thirty more were published in the sixteenth century; most of these were reprinted three, six or even eight times.

[21] Most eminent among them is Leofranc Holford-Strevens, the author of a remarkably erudite monograph significantly entitled *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and His Achievement* (2005). This has been, thus far, the sole comprehensive study of Gellius. It was first published in 1988 and was responsible for a renaissance of scholarship on *Attic Nights*. Polish publications on the "Antonine scholar's" work is still very scant; nor has it been fully translated into Polish.

analysis[22] to evaluate the quality of the "translation" from Greek to Latin. Let the ancient philologist speak for himself (Gellius 1927: 177–179):[23]

> What method should be followed in translating Greek expressions; and on those verses (…) which Virgil is thought to have translated either well and happily or unsuccessfully.

> Whenever striking expressions from the Greek poets are to be translated and imitated, they say that we should not always strive to render every single word with exact literalness. For many things lose their charm if they are transplanted too forcibly — unwillingly, as it were, and reluctantly.[24] Virgil therefore showed skill and good judgement in omitting some things and rendering others when he was dealing with passages of Homer or Hesiod or Apollonius or Parthenius or Callimachus or Theocritus, or some other poet.

For example, when very recently the *Bucolics* of Theocritus and Virgil were being read together at table, we perceived that Virgil had omitted something that in the Greek is, to be sure, wonderfully pleasing, but neither could nor ought to have been translated. But what he has substituted for that omission is almost more charming and graceful.

> Ballei kai maloisi ton aipolon ha Klearista
> Tas aigas parelonta, kai hady ti poppyliasdei.
> (Theocritus, *Bucolics*, 5.88f.)

> But when her goatherd boy goes by you should see my Cleärist
> Fling apples, and her pretty lips call pouting to be kissed.

> Malo me Galatea petit, lasciva puella,
> Et fugit ad salices, et se cupit ante videri.
> (Virgil, *Eclogues*, 3.46f.)

---

[22] In antiquity, this was a very popular scholarly method of *sýnkrisis* ("comparison"). It was, in fact, so frequently used that it became the butt of jokes: for instance, Meleager of Gadara wrote a comparative analysis of bean soup versus lentil soup. For the ways in which Gellius uses literary *sýnkrisis*, cf. Vardi (1996).

[23] A detailed discussion of this chapter can be found in the commentary by Lindermann (2006: *ad loc.*); yet his commentary focuses on lexical and syntactic matters and only skims through the examples of Virgil's *imitatio*. Before presenting this text for publication, the author was unable to consult the latest study by A. Garcea, "Aulu-Gelle, Probus et le problème de la traduction des textes poétiques" (2009).

[24] Gellius makes full use of the ambiguity of the term *transferre*: to carry across, hence to translate, but also to transfer or even to relocate. Thus words of a foreign language are shown as *expellees*, almost as prisoners of war. They are charming and graceful but will soon cease to be so when we brutally (*violentius*) force them to move to foreign parts.

My Phyllis me with pelted apples plies,
Then tripping to the woods the wanton hies,
And wishes to be seen before she flies.[25]

Also in another place I notice that what was very sweet in the Greek was prudently omitted:

Tityr, emin to kalon pephilamene, boske tas aigas,
Kai poti tan kranan age, Tityre: kai ton enorkhan
Ton Libykon knakona phylasseo, me ty korypse.
(Theocritus, *Bucolics*, 3.3ff.)

O Tityrus, well-belovéd, feed my goats,
And lead them to the front, good Tityrus;
But ,ware yon buck-goat yellow, lest he butt.

But how could Virgil reproduce *to kalon pephilamene* ("well-beloved"), words that, by Heaven! defy translation, but have a certain native charm? He therefore omitted that expression and translated the rest very cleverly, except in using *caper* for Theocritus' *enorkhan*; for, according to Marcus Varro, a goat is called *caper* in Latin only after he has been castrated.

Tityre, dum redeo, brevis est via, pasce capellas
et potum pastas age, Tityre, et inter agendum
occursare capro, cornu ferit ille, caveto.

Till I return — not long — feed thou my goats;
Then, Tityrus, give them a drink, but as you go,
Avoid the buck-goat's horn — the fellow butts!
(Virgil, *Eclogues*, 9.23ff.)

Even a cursory glance at the first two-line fragment from Theocritus in its Latin "translation" is enough to gain insight into the principles followed by Virgil in his work. The name of the heroine changes; it is worth noting that both Cleärist and Galatea belong to the repertoire of character names in idylls (as does John Dryden's Phyllis in his English translation). The author can switch from one to another with no detriment to the content and Gellius does not even mention it in his commentary. He is more interested in other things. The second line of the Greek original contains the onomatopoeic verb *poppyliasdein*, denoting a sound made by the lips: "to smack,"

---

[25] Trans. by John Dryden.

to "whistle," perhaps to "chirp." It is used, among other things, to describe the sound used to call a horse. Theocritus' poem features a flirtatious girl who wishes to attract the goatherd's attention and loudly blows him a kiss. Neither Latin nor English (nor Polish, for that matter) has a straightforward counterpart.[26] Virgil, as Gellius observes, does not try to render the enticing sound in Latin. Still, wishing to characterise his heroine as a brash coquette, he employs another image: his Galatea teases the goatherd and runs away, having first ensured the young man knows where to. It is this precise, brilliant psychological observation, made by Virgil in a single line, that Gellius describes as "more charming and graceful" (*iucundius lepidiusque*) than Theocritus's simple, if charming scene.

Gellius' second example presents a problem of a different nature. Theocritus' *emin to kalon pephilamene* is an instance of the grammatical subtlety characteristic of the Greek tongue. Had Virgil translated it into Latin, it would have lost much in succinctness and collocation.[27] But this is not the only reason why Virgil omitted this fragment. The phrase "O Tityrus, well-belovéd" can be understood as an allusion to homosexual love between the characters, perfectly acceptable in the Greek world, and to some extent in Roman literature as well.[28] Yet *Eclogue IX* (much like all others) is more than simple adaptation of Theocritus' work. Virgil clearly identifies the lines in question as a quotation: the protagonist quotes a fragment from a song of another, one Menalkas. Commentators agree that the latter serves as a cover for Virgil himself.[29] The homoerotic confession, understandable in other heroes, could have been risky if uttered by the author's *porte-parole*.[30] This is why Gellius writes that Virgil *caute omisit*, "omitted (…) very cautiously" the ambiguous Greek spot, filling the empty space with other matter. Hunter (1999: *ad loc.*) observes Virgil's replacement, "Till I return — not long," which also serves to express feelings towards

---

[26] Latin texts feature the word *poppysma* ("smacking"), a directly Latinised Greek verbal noun; a similar onomatopoeic lack in Polish has been remedied by "klik," or "kliknięcie" for a computer mouse click; in fact, one of its defeated rivals early in the computer age, "mlaśnięcie" or "mlask," is the exact counterpart of "smacking."

[27] The Greek *kalós* denotes "beautiful," yet it appears here in its adverbial usage of "very." This grammatical problem has been discussed (with more literature) by Lindermann (2006: *ad loc.*).

[28] As evidenced by *Eclogue II*, for instance, which opens with "Alexis, beauteous, and his lord's delight, was loved by Corydon, in hope's despite" (trans. John Dryden).

[29] This has been noticed as early as by Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*, 8.6.46–47).

[30] The author wishes to thank Professor Janina Ławińska-Tyszkowska for turning her attention to this aspect of Virgil's translation.

the other and to comfort him during their separation, but less directly than in Theocritus. Nevertheless, despite its difference from the original, this Latin passage is also praised by Gellius as "translated (…) very cleverly." The reason for this praise lies largely beyond the intuition of the modern reader, and also, in a way, beyond his or her perceptive potential: what matters here is the sound. It should be remembered that ancient literature was mostly supposed to be read aloud. The tonal quality of a literary text could have a great impact on its evaluation. While Virgil abandons attempts to render the content of the Greek original in Latin, he strives to preserve its tone. Both the Greek and the Latin passages begin with the protagonist's name, and the verb *boske* ("feed") sounds much like *pasce* in its ancient pronunciation of [paske]. The second line contains, in the middle, a phrase identical in Greek and Latin: *age Tityre*. Yet of the greatest interest is the observation that the word *potum* ("to drink"), which Virgil puts at exactly the same place in his line as that occupied by the Greek *poti*, is similar in sound, yet has nothing to do with the other's meaning: *poti* is *merely* a pronoun corresponding to "to" (*poti tan kranan*, "to the spring").[31] Moreover, once one analyses the scansion of the first hexameter, it becomes clear that it is identical in both Greek and Latin: five dactyls and a trochee. Yet this is where Virgil's mirroring of the Greek source ends and where he begins to improve upon it. The flowing dactylic meter of the first hexameter very nicely emphasises the meaning rendered by Virgil: the "return" will be "not long." There is no correspondence between meter and content in Theocritus' text. Clausen (1995: *ad loc*.) also indicates sophisticated means found in Latin rhetoric: a repetition of *pasce/pastas* and *age/agendum*, both pairs enclosing three words, and the insertion of *brevis est via* and *cornu ferit ille*, placed in the first and third lines immediately following the caesura. The Greek text cannot boast such a complex line structure: Theocritus' expression is enchanting in its simplicity.

The fragments quoted by Gellius make one believe that Virgil's *aemulatio* with Theocritus seems to have ended in – at least – a draw. At the same time, it is quite obvious that this type of translation should not be read

---

[31] Kozak (2008: 131–136) presents highly interesting remarks on homophonic translation and its modern examples. In her conclusions to the chapter "On mockery," she maintains that our approach to language is "too practical" for this type of translation to gain any popularity. Yet the Virgil passage discussed here shows that equivalence in sound – if used in moderation and with good intuition – does not quarrel with the practical side of translation; that it can and should occupy a more significant place among translation techniques. I owe my thanks to Dr Magdalena Heydel for this bibliographic pointer.

in place of the original; it would not function correctly without it. Such a poetic agon only makes sense when both authors' work can be compared. Therein lies the essence of *aemulatio*: in the possibility to compare languages both well known to the reader.

Now we ought to return to the beginning of the chapter under discussion. At the beginning, Gellius cites common opinions on translation technique: "not always," he says, should we "strive to render every single word with exact literalness." At first sight, this seems to fit quite neatly into what is usually expected of a translator as reconstructed from statements by the other ancient authors quoted above. Gellius' evaluation of Virgil's translations corresponds to these general principles: Gellius points out fragments where they depart from the Greek original and finds they can compete with Theocrotus in terms of artistry. However, Vardi (1996: 505) points out a small yet significant difference: writers of the first century CE *expected* departure from the original. The translated text was *supposed* to be modified, for this was the only way in which the talent of the modifying author could be demonstrated. Now, Gellius says that a translation does not have to be literal; the implication is it sometimes can be, or even should be. Gamberale (1969: 43; 168–172), who has analysed other statements by Gellius on translation, points out the writer's frequent remarks on whether an author deleted (*reliquit*), omitted (*praetermisit, omisit, praeteriit*) or modified (*mutavit*) anything. For Gellius, similarity to the original is a major element in his evaluation of translation quality, which places his views quite near to what is required of translators in modern times.[32] According to Vardi (1996: 506), the translator's modifications of the text are treated by Gellius "as a concession to the difficulty (and at times impossibility) of full correspondence to the original," and only secondly as a pretext for a display of literary artistry.

---

[32] In this context, particular significance must be attached to a general comment on Roman comedies contained in Chapter 2.23 of *Attic Nights*: some of them "appear to be written with a wit and charm which you would say absolutely could not be surpassed." Yet, Gellius complains, this impression disappears when we compare these modifications with their Greek originals, which are far superior in both style and humour. It is difficult to comment on this view as very few of these plays have survived. Is it not, however, a very understandable reservation from the point of view of the modern reader? Similar opinions have been voiced on many a modern translation. Vogt-Spira (2000) proposes an interpretation of Gellius' views based on his statements in Chapter 2.23 and the cultural environment that conditioned them.

The criterion of faithful adherence to the original is not as rare in ancient sources as might be gathered from the most popular quotations from Cicero, Horace and Quintilian. When one considers commentaries by grammarians – made somewhat later and treated with somewhat less reverence – a fair number of criticisms can be found of translations that are insufficient reflections of their originals, proof of misunderstanding or superficial interpretation. Gamberale (1969: *passim*) indicates several passages in Gellius where such an analytical approach seems to prevail. In the chapter discussed above, the short remark on Virgil's erroneous use of *caper* might serve as a good example. Had the Roman view on the essence of translation been uniform, or had Gellius been more consistent in his evaluation of translations, this lexical comment would have been unnecessary.

Vardi (1996: 510f.) strives to find the causes for the coexistence of the contrasting tendencies in ancient literary criticism and comes to the conclusion that it has to do with the way in which language and literature were treated at school. As we have said, at the earliest level of education, when Greek texts were used in teaching Greek, students were required to produce literal translations as a lexical exercise or as proof of having correctly understood the text. At a higher level, often taught by the same teacher, fragments of Greek literature were used as a model and inspiration in learning writing and speaking Latin. Literal translation was no longer necessary and was in fact undesirable: the Greek source was to serve as a basis for the student's very own and highly original Latin rendering of a theme. Exercises for students had all manner of functions and, for obvious reasons, their work was assessed by the teacher according to quite contrasting criteria: first, for reading comprehension and similarity to the original, second, in terms of consistency and the final effect of the target text.

These two approaches, instilled as they were in the educational process, must have had an impact on the way in which the Romans treated translation at a later, post-schooling stage (Vogt-Spira 2000: 685n7). Some statements by stylists from the Golden and Silver Ages of Latin literature advocate – as we have seen – departure from the original and its creative modification. By the same token, they seem to disagree with the first imitative method. Later commentators, including Gellius, emphasise the value of precision in translation. Changing circumstances were soon to cause this second view to dominate: first, the emergence of Christianity necessitated the literal translation of sacred texts. Secondly, the disuse of Greek created

a demand for translations that precisely reflected the content of the original. And the function of translation once again changed.

The author would like to thank Prof. Elżbieta Skibińska-Cieńska for her encouragement in dealing with this subject and for her valuable suggestions, as well as Dr Jan Rybicki for his precise, yet creative translation of this paper into English.

<div align="right">Trans. Jan Rybicki</div>

The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero. Vol. 4. Trans. C.D. Yonge. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1913-1921).

Bibliography

Adams, J.N. 2003. *Bilingualism and the Latin Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Baker, M., ed. 2001. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies.* London–New York: Routledge.

Bartol, K. 2005. "Per una morfologia della poikilographia antica." *Eos* 92, 210–223.

Bassnett, S. 2002. *Translation Studies*. London–New York: Routledge.

Beall, S.M. 1997. "Translation in Aulus Gellius." *Classical Quarterly*, NS (47), 215–226.

Binder, V. 2002. *Der neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike*. Vol. 12.1, Col. 1180–1191, s.v. "Übersetzung" Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler.

Cicero, M.T. 1913. "Treatise on the Best Style of Orators." *The Orations of Marcus Tullius Cicero.* Trans. C.D. Yonge. London: George Bell and Sons. http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=734&chapter=87668&layout=html&Itemid=27, 05.10.2013.

Cicero, M.T. 1899. *The Letters of Cicero. The Whole Extant Correspondence in Chronological Order. Volume 1.* Trans. Evelyn S. Shuckburgh. London: George Bell and Sons. http://www.gutenberg.org/files/21200/21200-h/21200-h.htm, 30.05.2013.

Clausen, W. 1995. *A Commentary on Virgil Eclogues*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Gamberale, L. 1969. *La traduzione in Gellio*. Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo.

Garcea, A. 2009. "Aulu-Gelle, Probus et le probleme de la traduction des textes poetiques." *Traduire Transposer Transmettre dans l'Antiquite greco-romaine*. Eds. B. Bortolussi et al. Paris: Picard. 17–26.

Gellius, A.C. 1927. *Attic Nights*. Vol. 2. Trans. J.C. Rolfe. Loeb Classical Library. http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Gellius/9*.html, 7.10.2013.

Harrison, S.J. 2007. "Translation and Culture in Ancient Rome: Virgil and the Practice of *Imitatio*." *Translation / Traduction / Ubersetzung, An International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies / Encyclopedie internationale de la recherche sur la tra-*

duction / Ein internationales Handbuch zur Ubersetzungsforschung. Eds. H. Kittel et al. 2007. Berlin–New York: Walter de Gruyter. 1137–1143.

Holford-Strevens, L. 2005. *Aulus Gellius. An Antonine Scholar and His Achievement*. Oxford: Oxford UP.

––– 2007. "An Antonine Litterateur: The Case of Aulus Gellius." *Translation / Traduction / Ubersetzung, An International Encyclopedia of Translation Studies / Encyclopedie internationale de la recherche sur la traduction / Ein internationales Handbuch zur Ubersetzungsforschung*. Eds. Kittel H. et al. 2007. 1143–1150.

Homeyer, H. 1965. *Lexikon der Alten Welt,* col. 3155–3157, s.v. "Übersetzungen." Zurich–Stuttgart: Weltbild-Verlag.

Horace. 1995. "Ars Poetica." Trans. L. Golden. In: *Horace for Students of Literature: The "Ars Poetica" and Its Tradition*. Eds. O.B. Hardison Jr, L. Golden. Gainesville: Florida UP. 7–22.

Hunter, R.L. 1999. *Theocritus: A Selection*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kaimio, J. 1979. *The Romans and the Greek Language.* Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica.

Kenney, E.J., and W.V. Clausen, eds. 1982. *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, II: Latin Literature.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Kozak, J. 2008. *Przekład literacki jako metafora. Między* logos *a* lexis, Warsaw: PWN.

Leonhardt, J. 2009. *Latein. Geschichte einer Weltsprache*. München: C.H. Beck.

Lindermann, J.-O. 2006. *Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae, Buch 9: Kommentar*, Berlin: Weißensee-Verlag.

Marshall, P.K., ed. 1968. *Auli Gellii Noctes Atticae*, vols 1–2, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Myśliwiec, H. 1985. "Narodziny przekładu w starożytności." [Birth of Translation in Anquity]. *Studia Linguistica* 9, 3–15 (reprinted in: *Opuscula philologica*. Eds. M. Krajewski, J. Pigoń. 2006. Wrocław: Polskie Towarzystwo Filologiczne, 237–249).

Pliny, the Younger. 1915. *Letters. With an English Translation by William Melmoth.* London: Heinemann. http://archive.org/stream/letterswithengli02plinuoft/letterswithengli02plinuoft_djvu.txt. 6.10.2013.

Quintilian. 1968. *The Institutio Oratoria with an English Translation by H.A. Mutler*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP.

Rener, F.M. 1989. Interpretatio: *Language and Translation from Cicero to Tytler*, Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Vardi, A.D. 1996. "Diiudicatio locorum: Gellius and the History of a Mode in Ancient Comparative Criticism." *Classical Quarterly* NS (46), 492–514.

Venuti, L., ed. 2000. *The Translation Studies Reader*, London–New York: Routledge.

Vogt-Spira, G. 2000. "Gellius, die romische Komödie und die Kategorie der *Imitatio*" in E. Stark, G. Vogt-Spira, eds. *Dramatische Waldchen. Festschrift fur Eckard Lefevre zum 65. Geburtstag*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 683–698.