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## Hendrik Conscience's *The Poor Gentleman* and its Italian Retranslations

### *International circulation of Dutch literature and the nine lives of a Flemish romantic novel*

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Dutch literature studies have undergone a true revolution in recent years, expanding their traditional focus on the literary circuit in the Netherlands and Flanders to include the circulation of Dutch-language literary products in other language areas. One of the most productive examples of this trend is the project *Circulation of Dutch Culture* (CODL, 2012-2015; see also Brems, Réthelyi & Van Kalmthout 2017), which postulated that literature should be studied “in an international context”, with a specific focus on the “export” of literature to other places. Understanding the circulation processes and their interrelationship can lead to a better comprehension of the cultural transfer of specific texts and of the cross-border circulation of literature more in general.

This evolution has been accompanied by broader developments within translation studies, with a considerable expansion of their field of work as a result. Alongside the logical focus on the textual transfer that underlies any translation operation, there has been growing attention for the sociocultural context, which subsequently increased the importance of reconstructing the history of translation attitudes and practices over time. Retranslations as well, as a specific form of translation, lie at the crossroads of all these trends.

The case study considered here to illustrate this point, the Flemish Romantic author Hendrik Conscience (1812-1883), has been one of the most surprising cases within the CODL project. The research on Conscience's circulation has uncovered an unexpected wealth of hitherto unknown editions in different languages (Couttenier & Verschueren 2013; Gera 2016), among others in Italian, the target culture that is also examined in this contribution. This allows not only a redefinition of Dutch literature in a global perspective, but also a reflection on the potential of retranslations as research objects.

### ***Status quaestionis* and corpus selection**

Outside Flanders, Conscience is nowadays almost unknown, except among specialists. However, this has not always been the case. The above-mentioned CODL project revealed that between 1846 and 1967 no less than fifty-nine translations (or re-translations) of Conscience's novels were published in Italian. A period long enough to reveal a number of (ideological) developments. If the very first translators, in the 1840s and 1850s, still paid attention to the cultural background of the author and his work (Dagnino 2013; *id.* 2020), from the 1860s onwards Conscience became *littérature de consommation*, partly influenced by similar developments in other countries, France in particular (Lambert 1980: 80-82). It is in this capacity that the emergence of a Catholic cultural network in Italy towards the end of the nineteenth century ensured that the author became virtually monopolised by Catholic publishers, who found in Conscience easy-to-read, moving stories with characters full of simple virtues and an unshakeable faith in God (Dagnino 2013). After WWII, and once more under

influence of the Catholic circuit, Conscience was eventually ‘shunted out’ as reading for adults and increasingly published as a youth author, with or without adaptations. In this context, the novel *De arme edelman* is a very interesting case study. Firstly, because it offers a chance to follow the above-mentioned developments closely and to do so on the basis of a number of concrete examples, which had not been done so far. Secondly, because ‘The Poor Nobleman’ has been the most (re)translated work by Conscience on the Italian market and, with no fewer than nine editions, it offers enough material for comparison and reflection on the phenomenon of ‘retranslation’ through the decades.

Obviously, it is impossible to analyse all translations in detail. We will limit ourselves to a partial exploration of salient textual elements, namely structural changes (e.g., number of chapters) and translation of *realia* and paratexts, when present, all aspects which can suggest us more about the intentions of publishers or translators. On the basis of existing data, we will also take into account the presumed intermediate translations in French or sometimes German. Conscience was in fact ‘doubly retranslated’, a retranslation being, according to Gambier, both a new translation in the same language and a translation from an intermediate language (Gambier 1994: 413). Conscience in Italy thus positioned himself at the crossroads of a complex field of influences that can only be touched upon selectively here. Furthermore, I will (critically) test my findings against Berman’s (1990) famous “retranslation hypothesis” which posited that retranslations are often more foreignizing than the very first domesticizing translation of the same work. This hypothesis has caused a great deal of controversy and the case studies that contradict it are nowadays innumerable and irrefutable. Its supposedly mechanical or teleological character has especially been met with sharp criticism (for an overview of counterarguments, see, among others, Deane-Cox 2014: 5). Nevertheless, the hypothesis had at least the merit to make clear from the beginning that retranslations, in whatever form, are all about the questions: why? and for what purpose? More specifically, a view of translated work as a mere one-way textual exchange from the source to the target circuit and/or as an object requiring a purely textual-comparative approach is clearly insufficient to explain the succession of retranslations of specific works. In line with a more general convergence between translation and cultural studies (Gentzler 2004: 166), Cadera has, therefore, argued for the development of a “systemic and contextual vision about the phenomenon of retranslation” (Cadera 2017: 15). Previously, Deane-Cox (2014: 24) had already stressed the importance of adopting a “socio-cultural approach”, with specific attention to “paratextual and extratextual clues” as a source to reconstruct “motivations and constraints” of the (re)translation process. In other words, in our specific case, what caused Conscience’s *Edelman* to get so many re-translations (or re-publications) in Italian? And what can we conclude about the intention and agenda of publishers/translators? Although focussing mainly on children’s literature, Lathey (2010: 174) posits that re-translations are a privilege reserved to renown works or classics. Yet we know that Conscience was never really canonised in Italy (Dagnino 2013). So why so many editions?

In the case of Conscience’s *Edelman*, there is one more issue at stake. A number of re-translations contain not only text and paratexts, but also illustrations, in the form of engravings. Recent literature has shown that it would be superficial to regard these illustrations as mere additions or decorations. In fact, they are an essential part of the retold story. Sometimes they even tell a story of their own and create a ‘dialogue’, as it were, between word and image (Elliott 2003: 16). The question therefore needs to be addressed how Conscience’s *Edelman* has been retranslated not only into words, but sometimes also into images, and what kind of information can be extracted from these. As a consequence, we will not go through the retranslations of *De*

*arme edelman* chronologically, but in two parts: first, the three retranslations (plus a re-edition) without pictures; subsequently, the five versions with pictures (or at least a cover image), which require as such a more specific comparison.

## **2. *De arme Edelman*'s nine Italian (re)translations: a story reinventing itself again and again**

### **2.1 *Il gentiluomo povero* (1855), *Leonora* (1871) and *Nobiltà e miseria/Oro e amore* (1889/1935)**

As emphasised earlier, most of Conscience's translations into Italian were done from other languages than Dutch. In Italy, this remained the case until the very last editions of his novels in the 1960s, with a preference for French sources. A trend that probably applied to many literary works from 'smaller' language areas.

The Dutch original *De arme edelman* was published in 1851, when the author was already quite famous in his own country. Instead of his historical novels, for which Conscience would be mostly celebrated later on, it was thanks to other stories, hardly ever read nowadays, that he found his way abroad in the first place (Wauters 2002). *The Poor Nobleman* was one of these moralistic-ruralistic stories. Soon published in German (*Der arme Edelmann*, 1853), English (*The Poor Gentleman*, 1854) and French (*Le gentilhomme pauvre*, 1854), it tells the plaintive story of a widower who, in order to help his brother, falls into abject poverty and then does everything he can to get his daughter to marry a rich man - but for love, not for money -, a goal that he ultimately manages to achieve against all odds. The book appealed to many readers as it was very much in keeping with the rural-romantic taste dominating in late-Romantic popular literature in mid-nineteenth century Europe.

The Dutch original was decorated with four drawings by the Belgian artist E. Dujardin. As far as we know, these illustrations had been reused or had disappeared in all three translations just mentioned. They are also absent in the very first Italian translation, published in 1855 by the Neapolitan *Stamperia e Calcografia Vico Freddo della Pignasecca*, a printing house which as such probably only had a local radius of activity. First of all, the title *Il gentiluomo povero* was supplemented by a subtitle: "*Scene della vita fiamminga. Romanzo del Sig. Henri Conscience*" (Scenes from the Flemish life. Novel by Mr Henri Conscience; Conscience 1855). From this addition one could conclude that the publisher wished to emphasize the Flemish element in the novel. This had already been the case with the first two translations of Conscience's stories in Italian, in 1846 (from German) and 1851 (from German, or possibly from Dutch), in which the translators partially acted as cultural mediators who also wanted to teach the reader something about Flemish history (Dagnino 2013; *id.* 2020).

Later on, Conscience would become a lot less 'intellectual' (and foreignized!) and the 1855 translation is already a clear harbinger of that. In fact, apart from the subtitle, the interest in Dutch-language cultural references remains very low. For example, the one-time mention of the seventeenth-century tragedy *Lucifer* by Joost van de Vondel is translated as "*Lucifero di Rondel*" (Lucifer by Rondel; Conscience 1855: 36).<sup>ii</sup> Furthermore, structural adaptations in the text reveal a more popularising 'adaptation'. Chapters 1 and 2 of the original appear to have been combined, so that the Italian edition has 10 chapters instead of 11. The fact that the last chapter is still number 11 is due to a numbering error: the Neapolitan edition has no chapter 8

and jumps directly from 7 to 9. In all chapters, a number of paragraphs are combined and some (often descriptive or repeating) paragraphs are omitted. This also happens at the very end of the story:

| <i>De arme edelman, 1851</i>   | <i>Le gentilhomme pauvre, 1864 [1854<sup>1</sup>]</i>   | <i>Il gentiluomo povero, 1855</i>  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>En daer Gustaf en Lenora, sidderend van hoop, hem in de oogen zagen, hief hy eensklaps den jongeling op, zoende hen met uitstorting des harten, en zegde :</p> <p>« Gustaf, myn dierbare zoon, de Hemel zegene uwe liefde. Maek myn kind gelukkig : zy is uwe bruid ! »</p> <p>« Gustaf, Gustaf, myn bruidegom! » galmde de maegd, daer zy haren vader en haren vriend terzelfder tyd in de armen vloog en beide in eene koortsige omhelzing sloot.</p> <p><b>De eerste liefdekus, de heilige huwelykszoen werd op des vaders borst gewisseld, terwyl de grysaerd de hoofden zyner verdwalende kinderen met zyne tranen besproeide, en zyne handen zegenend over hen hield uitgestrekt.</b></p> <p>(Conscience 1851: 206)</p> | <p>Gustave et Lénora, tremblants d'espoir, interrogeaient ses yeux ; il releva le jeune homme l'embrassa avec effusion, et dit : — Gustave, mon fils chéri, que le Ciel bénisse ton amour. Rends ma fille heureuse; elle est ta fiancée !</p> <p>— Gustave ! Gustave, mon fiancé ! s'écria la jeune fille en se jetant en même temps dans leurs bras à tous deux, et en les embrassant dans une même étreinte.</p> <p><b>Et le premier baiser d'amour, le baiser sacré des fiançailles, fut échangé sur le sein de cet heureux père, qui versait les plus douces larmes sur la tête de ses enfants prosternés, en étendant au-dessus d'eux ses mains bénissantes.</b></p> <p>(Conscience 1864: 291)</p> | <p>Gustavo e Leonora, tremanti di speranza, interrogavano i suoi occhi, ed egli rialzò il giovane e l'abbracciò con effusione dicendo:</p> <p>— Gustavo , mio caro figlio il cielo benedica il tuo amore ! Rendi mia figlia felice , essa è tua fidanzata !</p> <p>— Gustavo , Gustavo mio fidanzato ! esclamò la giovinetta gettandosi nello stesso tempo fra le braccia di entrambi e stringendoli nello stesso amplesso.</p> <p>[Ø]</p> <p>(Conscience 1855: 179)</p> |

All in all, the story has not been changed radically, but it is clear that compared to the first translations by Conscience, there was a need for an adapted product, possibly to make the story a bit shorter and thus more readable. Since similar changes cannot be found in the existing translations in other languages, it must be concluded that they have been brought about by the Italian publisher (or the translator?). Equally interesting is that the author's name has been changed into 'Henri' and not 'Enrico' as will often happen with Conscience. It is difficult to find out why, but since toponyms and first names that have been Italianised (such as Gustaf/Gustavo or Lenora/Leonora) are the ones which were already Frenchified in Wocquier's translation, it seems plausible that the translation was made from French without realising that 'Henri' itself was a translated name.

The story of *De arme edelman* did not remain confined to the catalogue of a small printing house. This happened not only under the influence of French (commercial) models, as we will see with the Sonzogno edition later on, but also because the story contained a strong religious component that soon sparked the interest of expanding Catholic publishers. The protagonist displays an unshakeable faith that ultimately proves essential for the happy conclusion of his misadventures. In 1871, the Turin publisher Marietti, a still existing educational “*tipografo pontificio*” (Pontifical typographer), decided to publish a translation of his own (Conscience 1871). First of all, the interest of Catholic printers in ‘light’ literature - with an edifying element - was something new. Studies on the history of the Italian literary circuit have shown that Church hierarchies had long harboured a strong distrust of ‘easy’ literature. Catholic literature could only consist of devotional and prayer books. After the middle of the 19th century, the idea was increasingly embraced that attack was the best form of defence, and that it was better to put selected Catholic novels on the market than to ban fiction altogether. As of that moment, an eager search was launched in order to find ‘good books’ that could easily be put to the service of this Catholic ‘reading pedagogy’ (Palazzolo 2010: 16; see also Piazza 2009). Although similar developments could be observed in other Catholic countries, and once more especially in France, Conscience’s appropriation by Roman Catholic publishers seems to have been much stronger in Italy than elsewhere. From about 1890 onwards, Conscience was hardly ever included in the catalogues of non-Catholic publishers (Dagnino 2013: 351). In fact, “[...] Mr Conscience was able to entertain, to move and to teach the unfortunate that they should trust in God, as much as in the love between father and children”, as one can read in the brief introduction to the Marietti translation (Conscience 1871: 3).<sup>iii</sup> All in all, an interesting example of how the final point of the translation chain Flanders-French-Italy did not automatically have to adopt a purely receptive attitude, but could also make the necessary interventions to make Conscience suitable for the Italian cultural debates.

A second element that catches the eye when browsing the Marietti translation is that it is an “*imitazione dal francese*” (imitation from French) by an unidentified Vincenzo Gibi. In other words, an adaptation from an alleged “*originale francese*” (French original; Conscience 1871: 3). Moreover, this translation focuses much more on the daughter, as shown by the equally adapted title, *Leonora ossia l'ottima delle figlie* (Leonora, or the best of daughters). In fact, the figure of Leonora represented, as it were, double profit for a Catholic publisher. She shares with her father a deep trust in God, but she is also an example of a young virgin who always puts respect for her parent first. This shift probably stems from the fact that the targeted readership became increasingly female (albeit not so explicitly yet), not only because women were supposed to read more novels at the time, but also because of the specific social function that Catholic thought ascribed to them, that of cornerstones of the family, who had to pass on the traditional faith and values to the following generation (Lyons 1998: 375; Chemello 1997: 182-185). Feminising (and rejuvenating) Conscience's story made it possible to pursue this agenda more actively and will soon result in increased efforts by Catholic publishers to reach a young, female audience. Subsequently, and quite inexplicably, the story is moved to the year 1852, ten years later than in the original, and every chapter is given a heading, such as “*Capo I. Di un povero cavaliere umiliato*” (Ch. 1. A poor gentleman humiliated) or “*Capo VIII. L'incanto*” (Ch. 8. The Auction). As Elliott puts it, added chapter titles represents a form of anticipation and, thus, of suspense, arguably increasing the interest of the readers (Elliott 2003: 23). Finally, Vincenzo Gibi's adaptation also means that names and *realia* are radically domesticised, “*rendendo italiano quel libro*” (in order to italianise the book). The story no

longer takes place in Antwerp, but in the northern Italian town of Varallo (also a pilgrimage destination!), where the characters drink a local Barbera instead of Château-Margaux, the main characters have Di Casabella (and not Van Vlierbeke) as their surname, and Leonora's fiancé is Adolfo Cordini and no longer Gustavo Denecker. Everything indicates that Marietti had clearly defined a macro readership policy (young, female, Catholic and Italian), and that the translator had to operate within that framework. Rather than a straightjacket, however, this combination also appears to have been the basis for an original adaptation of the story with highly domesticizing interventions at the micro level.

The 1889 *Nobiltà e miseria* (Nobleness and Misery) by the Milanese printer Bortolotti, on the other hand, stands out as being a “versione dal fiammingo” (a version from Flemish). On closer inspection, however, this appears to be doubtful. First of all, the mention will not be reused in the re-edition, under the title *Oro e amore* (Gold and Love), a title which incidentally suggests a very different story, published by the Milanese Catholic A.R.A. in 1935. The *realia* in German and not in Dutch, sometimes with Italian translation or explanation in the footnotes, seem particularly suspect. In fact, the toponyms “*de Roode Poort*”, “*Burgerhoutsche Poort*” and “*Echepoel*” (Conscience 1851: 10, 20, 35) become “*il Rothenthor*”, “*Bürgerholzerthor*” and “*Egelteich*” (Conscience 1889: 5, 14, 25) respectively.<sup>iv</sup> It is therefore reasonable to suspect that the claim ‘version from Flemish’ is not very reliable, a fact which in itself shows that this publisher (or translator?) expected to get more prestige by pretending, included for cheap consumer literature, to publish translations from the originals.<sup>v</sup>

2.2. *Il gentiluomo povero* (1869/1878), *Nobiltà e sventura* (1896), *Il castellano del Grinselhof* (1908) and *Il gentiluomo povero* (1955/1967).

That an analysis of words and context alone is not always sufficient is proven by the significant number of re-translations of *De arme Edelman* that have been enriched with illustrations. The first of these – the (anonymous) translation of *Il gentiluomo povero*, appeared in 1869 (and re-published identical in 1878), by the Milanese publishing house *Sonzogno* – allows us to state (and to question at the same time) the importance of the French intermediate culture. With *Sonzogno*, Conscience's transition to middle-brow literature is evident. *Sonzogno* was strongly focused on France and at one point had even opened a branch in Paris in order to pick up the novelties from the other side of the Alps quicker and to translate them as books or as *feuilletons* in one of the publisher's newspapers (Valisa 2011: 98; Cadioli & Vignini 2012: 29-30). Considering the relative broad format and the thin paper on which the novel is printed, this seems to have been the case here as well.<sup>vi</sup> It certainly was the case with the French translation by Léon Wocquier, which served as a source text. Wocquier's work was first published in 1854 in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and only afterwards in book format (Conscience 1856). For the rest, the *Sonzogno* product appears to have followed the French intermediate text faithfully, although with the addition of the subtitle “romanzo di Enrico Conscience” (novel by Enrico Conscience).

There is, however, another important change. Once again, it seems to be a case of French models being adapted to the agenda of the Italian publisher and his positioning strategy within the domestic literary field. *Sonzogno* had his edition decorated with twelve illustrations by an otherwise unidentified artist. These engravings are clearly different - in number and style - from Dujardin's drawings in the Belgian original (ill. 1 and 2). In itself, *Sonzogno*'s choice is not

surprising. Illustrations could make a popularised edition like this more attractive to the broad *Unknown Public* – as Wilkie Collins named it – the publisher was aiming for. From a translation history perspective, it is very interesting that this initiative was taken as an investment in a translated work, which calls into question the traditional view of translations as subordinate products within the circuit of the target language (Even-Zohar 1990, 46-52). Anyone who peruses the illustrations and their position in the book can easily find out what their purpose might have been. Not only do they show the key moments in the story (the nobleman's visit to the notary, the luncheon with Gustaf and his father, the departure from the castle, the happy ending, etc.), but they are also almost always placed a few pages *before* the event in question. This creates a dissonance that fuels the reader's curiosity. One might say that the engravings serve, as it had been the case for chapter headings elsewhere, as *visual cliff-hangers*.

Since the story and the style of *De arme edelman* were not particularly complicated or innovative, the retranslation undoubtedly had to have a conservative effect within the Italian market. Nevertheless, a retranslation can also have productive sides that should make us speak of interaction rather than simple reception. Sonzogno clearly wanted to market *his* own product (recognisable as such), which would end up having surprising consequences for editions in other languages in the years to come. The French Lévy edition from 1885 appears, for example, to have been expanded with the Sonzogno images of twenty years earlier, just like the Dutch-language edition from 1912 (Conscience 1912; see also Dagnino 2013: 346).

*Nobiltà e sventura* (Nobility and Misfortune) was a following retranslation of *De arme Edelman* published in 1896 by the Genoese (Catholic) printing house *Fassicomo e Scotti*. The reader is immediately warned: this is a “*traduzione e riduzione*” (translation and reduction) by a priest-translator, the Friar Minor Angelico Federico Gazzo, mostly known at the time for his translations (and adaptations!) of Italian and foreign literature into Genoese. This edition must have been somewhat popular, since the title page of the volume consulted for this article states that it was a copy out of the “*secondo migliaio*” (a second lot of thousand copies). It is certain that Fassicomo e Scotti spared no effort to make their product attractive. Particularly, 14 engravings were added to the book, different from those by Dujardin in the Dutch-language original, but also different from those used by Sonzogno in the 1860s. These new images, however, mostly with a short excerpt from the novel as a caption, do not seem to have been reused either in any following retranslation nor abroad. Furthermore, the depicted scenes only very partially correspond to those selected for the engravings by Sonzogno. What the readers finds here are mainly the emotional moments, such as the nobleman repairing his own broken boots (**ill. 3**) or his daughter in tears at Gustavo's departure for a long journey. Moreover, the images here are on the same page as the episode described and are in fact mostly static portraits of the characters more than images of dynamic scenes as in Sonzogno's edition. This retranslation of *De arme edelman* seems therefore to confirm for Italy the hypothesis, previously formulated for English literature (see Elliott 2003: 9-76), that towards the end of the nineteenth century engravings in novels increasingly had an mere illustrative rather than a narrative function, a forebode of them being marginalised later on and eventually reserved for children's literature.

The reason why precisely this novel was published is briefly explained in the preface written by the translator. It was a “*grazioso lavoretto del Conscience*” (gracious little work by Conscience), selected above all for its moral lesson: the “*virtù messa al cimento*” (tested virtue) is put forward as the source of “*nuova grazia*” (new grace) and “*nuovo splendore*” (new

splendour). Gazzo also makes his eventual intention clear: “*una leggiadra veste italiana*” (an elegant Italian version). Practically, this meant that some *realia* were italianised, but not all and especially not the surnames, even if they were sometimes misspelled (or misprinted). For example, the main character is consistently called “signor Ulirbecke”, with an initial U instead of V. Globally, the “*riduzione*” is less drastic than the word seems to imply, as it is in fact an almost complete translation.

1908 saw the release of a new version of *De arme edelman*, entitled *Il castellano del Grinselhof, o il creduto avaro* (The castellan of Grinselhof, or the alleged miser). This re-translation was published by the *Tipografia Pontificia e Arcivescovile dell’Immacolata Concezione* (Pontifical and Archiepiscopal Typography of the Immaculate Conception) in the northern city of Modena, which held a kind of monopoly on Conscience within the Catholic book sector at the turn of the century (Dagnino 2013: 349-352). It is also interesting that the Immacolata had Conscience’s novels put into Italian by an almost permanent translator, a certain “*sig.ra G.P.*” (Ms. G.P.), sometimes “*G.P. di Padova*” (G.P. from Padua) and later on “Giordana Perin”. Not much is known about this figure of cultural female mediator, only that all her translation work was done from French (*ibid.*: 352-354). More difficult to explain is why the author's first name is “Henry” and not ‘Henri’ or ‘Enrico’ as in all previous cases. An English source text does not seem likely, given the rest of the translator’s output and Conscience's track record in Italian. Furthermore, this is a complete translation, in which first names are italianised (Eleonora, Gustavo, etc.), but surnames are not (Van Vlierbecke, for instance). The location of the story has not changed, but a limited number of *realia* have. For example, the amount of 1000 francs that Van Vlierbecke tries to borrow in chapter 1 is translated as “Mille lire” (One thousand lire), in contrast to all other re-translations in which the original “Mille franchi” was chosen (Conscience 1908: 9). Finally, chapters are given headings, such as “*I. La tabacchiera d'oro*” (The golden snuffbox) and “*II. Angosce e timori*” (Anguish and fear), and in doing so also the final word of the omniscient narrator is given a separate place and get the heading “*Conclusione*”. Interestingly enough, this edition is also enriched with a total of three illustrations. In the first, at the end of chapter 3, Eleonora is depicted sitting down, about to fall asleep after having realised that she is in love with Gustavo (**ill. 4**). This illustration refers to a scene in chapter 2, much earlier in the book, and is in fact a portrait of a young woman sitting on a chair. The same happens with the two other engravings, one of which is also reproduced at the beginning of the book, opposite the title page, giving it here a more anticipatory function than it has within the story. Apart from this exception, all are static images referring back to scenes that have already been described in word. No visual cliff-hangers, therefore, or illustrations of the corresponding passages. As a matter of fact, the engravings are here merely decorations of the book: they do not contribute significantly to the narrative component of the retranslation, but are there just for adornment, probably in order to make the product more appealing and sellable.

Conscience’s slow development from *littérature de consommation* to children’s and especially girls’ literature becomes even more clear if we consider the two most recent re-translations. It is in fact one single re-translation, from French: “*Titolo originale: LE GENTILHOMME PAUVRE*” (Conscience 1955: 4). It was first published in 1955 by the Catholic publisher SAIE in Turin (under the name “Henry Conscience”) and then re-published in 1967 by a Sicilian subsidiary of the equally religious *Paoline* (here with “Henri Conscience” as the author’s name). It is a complete translation, with minimal adaptations, in particular the deletion (or shortening) both of descriptive passages and very short fragments of indirect speech within

dialogues. Here follows an example from ch. 8 in which the (rather redundant) description of Lenora's thoughts during one of her walks in the garden is omitted:

| <i>De arme edelman, 1851</i>   | <i>Le gentilhomme pauvre, 1864 [1854<sup>1</sup>]</i>  | <i>Il gentiluomo povero, 1955</i>  |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Lenora zelve was overtuigd, dat zy, — nu haers vaders armoede openbaer geworden was — van alle verwachting moestafzien; eventwel, het was haer zulk zaligen krachtgevend gevoel, te weten dat Gustaf haer nog immer beminde! Te weten dathy, wiens beeld haer hart vervulde en hare droomen bezielde, voortdurend aen haer dacht en treurde om hare afwezigheid!</p> <p><b>Zy insgelyks, aen hare beloften getrouw, zy sprak zoo dikwyls zynen naem in de eenzaamheid; zoo menige zucht steeg op van onder den Katalpa-bosch, als wierde hy den wind toevertrouwd om den wensch harer ziele naer mildere streken te voeren! Zy herhaelde in stilte zyne teederste bekentenissen; en, in hare mymerwandelingen tusschen het loover der paden, bleef zy staen op elke plaets, waer een woord, een handdruk, een oogslag van hem haer ooit had ontroerd.</b></p> <p>Alsof alle de rampen, die het hart des edelmans konden verbryzelen, in eenmael op hem moesten nederstorten, ontving hy eene tyding uit Amerika, waerby hem de dood zyns broeders werd gemeld.</p> <p>[148]</p> | <p>Maintenant que la pauvreté de son père était publiquement connue, Lénora elle-même était convaincue qu'il lui fallait renoncer à toute espérance; cependant elle se sentait heureuse et fortifiée par la pensée que Gustave l'aimait encore, que celui dont le souvenir et l'image remplissaient son cœur songeait toujours à elle et gémissait de son absence !</p> <p><b>Elle aussi tenait fidèlement ses promesses : que de fois elle prononçait dans la solitude le nom de son bien-aimé ! que de soupirs s'échappaient de son sein sous le catalpa, comme si elle eût voulu confier au zéphir la mission de porter vers des climats plus doux les vœux de son âme ! Elle redisait seule ses plus tendres aveux, et, dans ses promenades rêveuses sous l'ombrage des chemins préférés, elle s'arrêtait à chaque endroit où un mot, un serrement de main, un regard de lui l'avait émue...</b></p> <p>Comme si tous les malheurs qui pouvaient briser le coeur du gentilhomme devaient l'accabler à la fois, il reçut d'Amérique la nouvelle de la mort de son frère.</p> <p>[206-207]</p> | <p>Adesso che la povertà di suo padre era pubblicamente conosciuta, Leonora stessa era convinta che bisognava rinunciare ad ogni speranza; tuttavia ella si sentiva felice e fortificata dal pensiero che Gustavo l'amava ancora, che colui, il ricordo e l'ammirazione del quale riempivano il suo cuore, pensava sempre a lei e gemeva per la sua lontananza!</p> <p>[Ø]</p> <p>Come se tutte le disgrazie si fossero accordate ed unite per spezzare il cuore del gentiluomo, egli ricevette dall'America la notizia della morte di suo fratello [...]</p> <p>[148-149]</p> |

Moreover, not only was the translator, Giuseppe Rigotti, a relatively well-known writer of youth novels at the time, but also other elements, including the cover images (the only ones in both editions), were most likely intended for a young (female) audience (ill. 5 and 6). The 1955 cover, for example, features a young couple in presumably nineteenth-century clothes in which the man, with a magnetic gaze and a firm arm, irresistibly draws the lady towards him. In 1967, on the other hand, a young woman in a suit and an attractive boy in business attire were chosen. The impression is that it is the lady who is wooing the man here. Apparently, with the clothes, the sex relations had also been modernised. In both cases, the emphasis is clearly on the love and passion element. The moralising story of the poor nobleman, who is materially destitute but remains spiritually noble, is only revealed to readers when they actually start to read the novel. Moreover, the 1967 edition appeared in an unidentified series called “*Primavera*” (Spring), which again indicated young women as the main audience (“*per signorine*”).

Arrived at this point, the inevitable question is why these retranslations of the *Edelman* were the last Conscience editions in Italian altogether. In other words, why did the obvious attempt to modernise and rejuvenate *De arme edelman* fail in the end? The blurbs of both editions offer a clear answer. The SAIE edition emphasises that Conscience was especially important because of the role he played in the awakening of Dutch literature in Belgium. He always adopts a “prudent and healthy realism”, but the psychology of his characters usually remains “*superficiale*” (superficial). Analogous reflections are to be found in the Paoline edition: the author shows a “*romanticismo ingenuo*” (naïve romanticism) and uses a “*tono patetico e grottesco*” (pathetic and grotesque tone), at which the contemporary reader, who can clearly feel the historical distance, cannot but look with ironic eyes. Clearly, Conscience had reached his expiry date. By means of adaptations and a reorientation towards new (younger and thus less sophisticated) readers, an attempt had been made to use him as a (Catholic) writer for as long as possible, but his work had eventually been strained to the limit. Its moralism and *pleurnicherie* had become too evident even for inexperienced readers.

## **Conclusion.**

This inevitably brief survey of Italian re-translations of *De arme edelman* by the Flemish Hendrik Conscience has shown that the existence of different phases in the reception of this author in Italy is not only revealing about publishers’ ideological backgrounds or developments within the Italian book market, but also had consequences for the degree and the nature of the interventions that either publishers or translators considered acceptable. As a complicating factor, intermediate translations were always used, which suggests that Conscience was not only (and not so much) a product of interaction between the Dutch and Italian literary circuits, but had much to do with the reception of French (or German) publishing trends on the Italian market. In fact, only in 1889 a virtually complete textual translation was published. In all other cases, there were adaptations within the text or additions in the form of headings to chapters or engravings. All these (re)translations therefore have their own peculiarities, all the more remarkable since they were all (1889 being again the only exception) almost certainly made from one and the same French text, namely the by then only existing (albeit repeatedly republished) translation by Léon Wocquier from the 1850s.

This once more seriously jeopardises the notorious retranslation hypothesis. In fact, even where we deal with an almost complete textual translation (visual additions excepted), this appears to

have occurred not necessarily out of a genuine cultural-historical interest in Conscience, who, on the contrary, was rapidly being relegated to the category of children's and girls' literature. Due to the further evolution of this type of literature, which from the 1960s onwards mostly abandoned bourgeois moralism and prudery, Conscience has not been republished or retranslated since 1967. In addition to the changing literary value system, one should not forget the transformation of book trade either. In fact, publishers appear to have been essential for taking the initiative of the many (re)translations of *De arme edelman* (and other Conscience's novels more generally), even though this claim may somewhat be biased due to the lack of data on translators. It was well known that the author never reached a canonised status within the Italian literary circuit. His 'fame' cannot therefore have been the source of the consistent number of re-editions. The strong commercial character that Conscience's novels soon acquired, under the influence of French models, may have caused him to become widely spread, but also to be removed relatively quickly from publishers' catalogues. The fact that these publishers were partly local printers probably complicated the author's visibility in Italy even more. Albeit possibly not outdated stylistically or linguistically, a specific (re)translation might have rapidly become hard to find, which prompted (re)edition. To sum up, the number of re-translations seems to be mainly the result of the will of (Catholic) publishers to exploit the romantic, moralistic and ruralistic potential of *De arme edelman* either commercially or ideologically for as long as possible, even though by investing in new translations and sometimes original middlebrow products. However, further research will have to clarify whether and to what extent earlier versions influenced successive re-translations and whether circulation of rights to literary works within the Catholic circuit played any role.

In other words, the way in which one and the same text is translated, adapted, marketed and sometimes downright mutilated over time offers an opportunity to reconstruct the development of book markets, public tastes, views on translation, etc. in the target culture. For the nineteenth century in particular, this can be done on the basis of specific examples, as extensive publishers' or translators' archives are not always available. Moreover, translations (and re-translations) into the target language did not always have a purely receptive (passive) character, as has been often assumed, but should sometimes be taken as one of the (active) poles of an interaction network. The target culture makes a foreign book its own, but reworks it (even more than merely re-translating it) so that the new product could lead a life of its own and sometimes even become an export product in its own right. This was the case, for instance, with the international circulation of the 1869 Sonzogno engravings that complemented the story of *De arme Edelman* which was, one might say, triply retranslated – doubly in words (from intermediate texts, and nine times into Italian) and then also in images. As a result, the reputation of translations as cultural products subordinated both to the original text and other domestic products is in urgent need of revision, as is the traditional opposition domesticizing-foreignising, which does not always seem to be adequate to analyse specific case studies. For example, textual adaptations of Conscience mostly not aimed at opening up a foreign-language culture to Italian readers, but rather at improving commercial readability (and selling figures). And there exist also paratextual or implicit adaptations, such as ignoring that Conscience was a Dutch-language writer or combining an integral translation (potentially foreignising) with new, original illustrations to create a totally new product. After all, (re)translations were and remain semiotic *Gesamtwerken*, which are not only reproduced in word but sometimes also in image, and as such actively adapted, modified and manipulated in ways that are usually not to be predicted in advance.

[tot. 6461 words]

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## Illustrations' descriptions

- Ill. 1: *De arme Edelman* as seen by E. Dujardin (1851) (source: Erfgoedbibliotheek Conscience, Antwerp, no. 523990 [s4-115 c])
- Ill. 2: *Il gentiluomo povero* as presented by Sonzogno, on page 1 in the 1878 edition (and previously, in the first 1869 edition, on page 3) (source: book from the author's private collection)
- Ill. 3: The poor nobleman forced to repair his boots himself, taken from the Fassicomo e Scotti retranslation (1896) (source: Biblioteca Diocesana del Seminario Vescovile, Biella)
- Ill. 4: Lenora on a chair, exhausted by her feelings for Gustavo, as depicted in the retranslation by the Immacolata Concezione (1908) (source: Biblioteca Civica, Biella)
- Ill. 5: SAIE's cover of *Il gentiluomo povero* (1955) (source: Biblioteca Centrale Nazionale, Florence, no. BN 1956 532)
- Ill. 6: Paoline's modernised cover (1967), the last appearance of Conscience in Italian (source: Biblioteca Centrale Nazionale, Florence, no. BN 70-821)

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<sup>ii</sup> However, this might be a misprint, as it seems to be the case elsewhere. For example, in this very same translation, the name of the main character's creditors, the Hoogebaen heirs, is evidently misspelled ("Floogenbaen"; Conscience 1855: 13).

<sup>iii</sup> "*Il signor Conscience riuscì [...] a dilettere, a commuovere, ad istruire gli sventurati nella confidenza di Dio, nell'abnegazione e nell'amor paterno e filiale*". No less moralistic, but less explicitly religious was the opinion of a 'non-Catholic' publisher as Sonzogno, as proved by the introduction to another work by Conscience (*'t Wonderjaer*, 1836): "[...] *il Gentiluomo povero [...] venne giustamente e grandemente lodato da tutti per l'arte squisita, pel soave colorito nel dipingere i costumi e più particolarmente per le commozioni che ispira e che sono educatrici a magnanimi sensi*" (the *Gentiluomo povero* was rightly and highly praised by all for its exquisite art, its gentle depiction of customs and, more particularly, for the emotions it inspires, thus prompting the most magnanimous sentiments.). See E. Conscience, *L'anno portentoso*. Milan: Sonzogno, 1884, p. 3.

<sup>iv</sup> In the Bortolotti translation *Clara (Houten Clara)*, 1850), from 1889, a similar strategy was applied, in this case as well with usage of a German intermediate text (Dagnino 2013: 347).

<sup>v</sup> In spite of a handful of translations from German, Conscience continued to be mainly translated from French and was sometimes presented as a French writer. This was also the case for the school edition of Wocquier's version, published by Signorelli (Milan) in 1936. Although technically not an Italian (re)translation, the inclusion of the novel in the series '*Scrittori francesi*' is telling about the relative lack of interest for his Dutch background. It is also interesting that in the introduction, for the first time, some negative points were explicitly mentioned. In fact, the story, despite its realism and moral value, would suffer from a '*certaine pleurnicherie déclamatoire*' and a shallow psychology of the characters. The novel thus seemed to experience increasing difficulty to keep up with the evolution of the readers' taste. See Conscience 1936.

<sup>vi</sup> Unfortunately, the Sonzogno archive was destroyed during a bombing raid in WWII. See Dagnino 2013: 342.