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The manifold strategies of seventeenth-century translators: the case of Du Verdus as translator of Thomas Hobbes

Luc Borot (Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier III)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0000-0000-0000>

Abstract:

In the mid seventeenth century, European scholars on the frontline of philosophical discussions corresponded and exchanged their works in manuscript or in print, as they had always done, but a strong trend towards publishing their work in the vernaculars and towards translating each other's works between vernaculars was building up. The French mathematician Guillaume du Verdus had become friends with the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, and ambitioned to translated the latter's English *Leviathan* into French. In spite of all his endeavours and of Hobbes's friendly support, he could not become proficient enough in English to safely translate the book, hence his decision to translate the Latin *De Cive*, an earlier work of political philosophy by Hobbes. What can explain this choice? How were modern languages taught in early modern Europe? Was Du Verdus's decision to translate Hobbes mainly due to philosophical or ideological reasons? How can we contextualise such choices from internal and external evidence?

Keywords:

Translation

Early modern European culture

Philosophy

Politics

Ideology

Language teaching

Though he won himself a reputation as a feisty polemicist, Thomas Hobbes emerges from his letters as having had a gift for friendship, and even for enduring long-distance ones. As Quentin Skinner showed, the circle of friends that Hobbes built in France during his 11-year exile there proved eclectic, mercurial and affectionate. The luminaries whose affection he cultivated were among the most innovative men of his time, and were as different from him as Pierre Gassendi, Marin Mersenne (Catholic

priests), Abraham Du Prat (a Huguenot physician), Charles Du Bosc (a royal councillor) or François Belleau du Verdus (a mathematician and philosopher).¹

François Belleau du Verdus (1621-1675) was a Gascon gentleman from a well-connected Catholic family with members in the *Parlement* of Bordeaux over several generations.² He was a brilliant mathematician, a student of Gilles de Roberval, directly involved with some of the leading mathematicians of the age, of whom Hobbes claimed to be one. He was well versed in the fashionable but dangerous ideas of the *libertins* (epicureanism, materialism, scepticism), which brought him close to Hobbes, whom he first met in 1651 though he may have heard of him before through his acquaintances Roberval, Pierre de Fermat and Mersenne.³ He seems to have been a node in the network of French Hobbists, as he was acquainted with Hobbes's Huguenot-born friend Samuel Sorbière.⁴ The latter was at one point Hobbes's editorial caretaker in Amsterdam. He was also a translator, best known for translating Hobbes's 1642/47 *De Cive*, a translation first published in 1649, with many later editions.

Du Verdus published a much-forgotten translation of the same work in 1660. But why did his published translation contain only fourteen of the eighteen chapters of *De Cive*? Why did he address a Hobbist dedicatory epistle to young Louis XIV in 1660? And why did he translate *De Cive* rather than *Leviathan*? Du Verdus had been learning English to translate the latter, as we know from several letters he sent to

¹ Quentin Skinner, "Thomas Hobbes and his Disciples in France and England," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8 (1966), 153-67.

² See his biography by Noel Malcolm in Luc Foisneau (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes français du XVII^e siècle* (henceforth *Dictionnaire...*), (Paris: Garnier, 2021) vol. 1, 750-54; and in the "Biographical Register of Hobbes's Correspondents," N. Malcolm (ed.), *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol.2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 904-12.

³ Malcolm, "Biographical Register," *Correspondence*, vol.2, 908-9, quotes a letter to Mersenne in 1648 in which he claims to like nothing more than pyrrhonism.

⁴ Malcolm, "Biographical Register," *ibid.*, 909.

Hobbes,⁵ while several Paris booksellers had endeavoured to hire a translator to get the book into French.⁶

To answer these, and other questions, this chapter will first look at the book itself, then at the translator's work in its context, then at the ideological strategies behind the omission of part 3 of *De Cive* and behind the absolutist arguments proffered to the king in the epistle dedicatory. Among the underlying questions will be: what was the relationship between Latin as the intellectual lingua franca of Europe and the nascent philosophical idiolects that were emerging in seventeenth-century vernacular languages? Which instruments were at the disposal of Europeans to learn foreign languages? Was it always safe to translate English philosophy in the early years of Louis XIV's France?

I. Du Verdus's *Éléments de la Politique*

A translator is a second-level author, being responsible for the experience that the readers of the target-language will have of the original author's voice. In this paper, Du Verdus is first considered as author of the translation, *i.e.* of the French reader's experience of Hobbes as a thinker, then only as translator in the history of translation.

What does the book look like?

The full title of the printed book is *Les Elemens de la Politique de Monsieur Hobbes, de la traduction du sieur du Verdus*. Materially, the copy studied for this paper, which is the one digitised by the Gallica project, is an in-4° of 257 pages (28 unpaginated pages of preliminary material, 226 pages of translation, 1 page of errata and 2 pages of Royal privilege to publish a translation of Bacon's *De Sapientia Veterum* and other

⁵ Letter 67, in Noel Malcolm (ed.), *The Correspondence of Thomas Hobbes*, vol. 1, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 187-8

⁶ Skinner, "Hobbes and his Disciples," 159; Luc Foisneau, "Charles Du Bosc," *Dictionnaire*, vol.1, 666, names Jacques du Roure; Abraham Du Prat to Hobbes, Letter 74 (24 September 1655) names the same man, described as a Cartesian philosopher, and informs Hobbes of the other endeavours undertaken by himself, Sorbière and Du Verdus to translate his philosophy into French, *Correspondence* vol.1, 212.

related philosophical works (dated 1653, seven years before the publication of *Elemens...*).⁷

The printer's work seems of quality. To every chapter is prefixed a list of items dealt with, as in most printed editions of the original work. The edition used by the translator would seem to be L3, according to Howard Warrender's genealogy of editions, that is, the 1647 Amsterdam Elzevir edition on which most of the later editions were to be based. Sorbière and Hobbes exchanged letters in August and November 1647 about the preparation of this edition.⁸ Hobbes was severely ill during its preparation, and therefore probably could not undertake serious work on revisions.⁹

The table of contents of the *Elemens* gives the whole list of chapters, outlining the three parts of the original. The printer's note to the reader makes clear that this is not the whole translation, as Du Verdus himself declared in his epistle to Louis XIV.¹⁰ Neither document explains which parts were omitted. Strategically, as we shall see, the third part, *Religio*, is missing. But it is not the only pretermitted material: in his book, Hobbes introduced very important remarks between some items. Yet, some omissions point to the very first edition of the book (1642) as the translator's copy-text. Indeed, though Du Verdus inserts asterisks and marginalia telling the reader: "Voyez les remarques," viz. to look at the remarks, they are nowhere printed in the book. Yet, some of them were meant by Hobbes to complement the theory with important examples. In letter 84 of 24 May 1656, the translator asks Hobbes if he

⁷ Twenty years later, Du Verdus was still trying to get a *placet* from the king to have the book published with his dedication to Hobbes.

⁸ Letters 54-56, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 161-4.

⁹ Howard Warrender, *De Cive: the Latin Version*, Clarendon Edition of the Philosophical Works of Thomas Hobbes II (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983; henceforth *DCiL*), introduction, 45-7.

¹⁰ Letter 75, *Correspondence* vol.1, 216; Guillaume du Verdus, *Les Elemens de la politique de Monsieur Hobbes* (Paris: Henri Legras, 1660: henceforth *Elemens*), "Épître au Roy," sig. á ii r^o.

should go on translating from the 1st edition, lent to him by Martel or from the second which contains the annotations.¹¹ The arguments and themes touched upon in such notes were later on to become parts of the central argument of *Leviathan*.¹² An explanation for this discrepancy is offered in Warrender's notes to his edition of the Latin version: the *annotationes* are missing from the manuscript and the first edition; in this case, Du Verdus may have translated from the first edition, managed to get hold of the second long enough to spot where the annotations were, hence he inserted "voyez les remarques," but not long enough to translate them. If it was a printer's mistake, it was in keeping the notices without the texts they were meant to refer to. If it is the translator's strategic choice, he may have feared that Hobbes's annotations should have too clearly revealed the 'Pyrrhonian' inclinations of the work.

It is alleged in the epistle to the king and in the printer's note to the reader that Du Verdus translated the three parts of Hobbes's *Elementa Philosophica*.¹³ This may suggest a composition date between 1658 and 1660 for the *Elemens*, as *De Homine*, the second part and the last published, was issued in 1658. But since Du Verdus had been acquainted with Hobbes's thought since the 1650s, he could have considered working on *De Cive* long before, as the book was first published in 1642. In his letter to Hobbes dated 20 August 1654, he begs Hobbes to send him the proofs of a book in progress,¹⁴ and assures him that *De Cive* is "his breviary."¹⁵ In a later letter, in December 1655, he reports having translated *De Corpore*, and planning to translate the other two parts of the *Elementa*, and *Leviathan*.¹⁶ Six months later, in Letter 84 of

¹¹ Letter 84, *Correspondence* vol.1, 283/286 for Malcolm's translation.

¹² For example the annotation to *DCiL* I.2 on the phrase "mutuo metu", *viz.* of mutual fear (*DCiL*, 92-3) is the pattern for chapter XIII of *Leviathan*, ed. Noel Malcolm, vol. 2, 194.

¹³ Guillaume du Verdus, *Elemens*, sig. á ii r^o, í iii r^o-v^o.

¹⁴ Malcolm claims it was *De Homine*, but chronology points to *De Corpore*: "Biographical Register," *Correspondence*, vol.2, 909.

¹⁵ Letter 68, *Correspondence* vol.1, 194.

¹⁶ Letter 75, *Correspondence* vol.1, 216-7.

24 May 1656, he describes his enthusiasm at having started work on *De Cive* a few days before, in mid-May.

Another way of looking at the translator's working schedule would be his complete adhesion to Hobbes's philosophical project, which may have led him to wait for the publication of the whole *Elementa* sequence in order to translate them in the philosophical order designed by Hobbes, rather than in their publication order, even though he must have read them in that particular order.

This translation could have been very different, or never have seen the light, had Du Verdus acquired a better working knowledge of English. In Letter 67, of July/August 1654, he described his method to learn English under an English-speaking scholar "un Docteur qui scait vostre langue," from whom he was getting lessons in pronunciation and grammar, in order to produce a translation that he copied between the printed lines of his book "une version interlinéaire dont j'écris tous les jours ponctuellement sur la ligne ce qui m'a été dicté, dans mon livre le seul que j'aye trouvé à acheter en tout Paris."¹⁷

The instruments that Du Verdus might have found at his disposal in the 1650s to learn English and check his translations were not many, but well established. The first handbook designed for French-speakers wishing to learn English was Jacques Bellot's *Maître d'escole anglois* (the English Schoolmaster), constantly reprinted since its first publication in 1580, though sometimes without his name, or his *Familiar Dialogues for the Instruction of them that be desirous to speake English...* of 1585.¹⁸ The latter work is printed in three columns, featuring English, French and a sort of phonetical transcription whose efficacy in teaching English pronunciation may well be doubted. Two works that he declares using are Randle Cotgrave's *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (1st edition in 1611) Robert Sherwood's *Dictionnaire Anglois &*

¹⁷ Letter 67, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 187/190 in English translation. Du Verdus explains that he writes between the lines of his copy the meaning that his teacher dictates to him. His copy of *Leviathan* is the only one he could find in Paris.

¹⁸ Susan Baddeley's introduction to her edition of Bellot's *The French Method/La Méthode française* (Paris: Garnier, 2010), 9-41, provides a wealth of details on the context of French-teaching in Tudor London, and on the posterity of Bellot's and Hollyband's (de Sainliens) didactic publications.

François, pour l'utilité de tous ceux qui sont désireux de deux langues. A Dictionary English and French; Compiled for the commodity of all such as are desirous of both the Languages, in which he would have found the principles of grammar and pronunciation.¹⁹ His negative judgment on the quality of the latter work testifies his lack of knowledge of some linguistic realities of English.²⁰

In the same letter of October 1656, he complains that he can find no English-Latin or Latin-English dictionaries in Paris, and laments that Hobbes's publisher, Crooke, fails to send him one. It is a pity, since he would have found a very useful one for his purpose, as all the revisions of John Rider's *Dictionary* added lists of French and Italian words to the original lists of Latin and English ones provided in his 1589 *Bibliotheca Scolastica*. Numerous augmented re-editions of this work, most featuring the name of Francis Holyoke as editor, appeared in 1627, 1633, 1640 and 1649. Claiming to add more practical terms to the lists, these re-editions show a drift from a learners' dictionary for Latin classes in schools towards a businessman's or tradesman's clerk's or traveller's manual. Latin remained the stem-language allowing the users to create bridges between the documents exchanged with their partners, correspondents or acquaintances. If Du Verdus had had access to this piece of lexicography, he would certainly have improved his understanding of Hobbes's major work.

Among other possible sources, he could have used *Grammaire angloise pour promptement apprendre la langue angloise*, published in Paris with a dedication to Henrietta-Maria, sister of Louis XIII, who had just married Charles, Prince of Wales, the future king Charles I. Baddeley mentions 11 reprints of this book until 1695, and

¹⁹ The editions checked were the joint edition of Randle Cotgrave's English-French dictionary (*Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues*, 1st edition in 1611), and Sherwood's of 1632 and the 1650 separate one of Sherwood's. In the 1650 edition, the linguistic sections can be found sig. Gg3 r^o-Gg4 r^o.

²⁰ Letter 14 (30 October 1656), *Correspondence*, vol.1, 322.

describes it as a compilation of Sainliens and Bellot.²¹ It dedicates 17 pages to the description of pronunciation and spelling, both summarised in the appendix that follows the 205 pages of the main text.

As noted in a previous inquiry into Hobbes's relationship with his followers, one may doubt the linguistic competence of his "Doctor" and the goodwill of others. It is not unlikely that the Englishmen of letters he queried were reluctant to be seen to understand the materialist thought of Hobbes, whose reputation needed no undoing by 1654. That he should pretend not to find, for example, the word *limbs* in the dictionaries of Cotgrave and Sherwood betrays his insufficient familiarity with printed English and with the vagaries of English spelling, for indeed, checking the joint edition of their respective French-English and English-French dictionaries of 1632, the word can be found in both Cotgrave (sig. fff v r^o, as translation of "Membre") and Sherwood (sig. Y ii r^o), where it is spelt "limme".²² As Malcolm explains in a note to letter 67 of August 1654, he could also refer to the joint edition that was reprinted in 1650 in London.²³

In Letter 75 of December 1655, discussing his translation projects and ethos, he declares that he is stopped in his *Leviathan* undertaking "faute d'un bon dictionnaire," for lack of a good dictionary. Nonetheless, as he comments on several paragraphs of his translation of *De Corpore*, it becomes clear he was largely more comfortable with Latin, which was not surprising, as modern languages were not taught in schools. For gentlemen, the subject was undertaken either at home or in private language

²¹ Baddeley, intro., 20. All editions are anonymous. The dedication of the 1625 edition that was checked for this paper is dated "Au Collège de Navarre, ce 8. Février 1625" with no name.

²² Luc Borot, "La posture philosophique de Hobbes," in *La figure du philosophe dans les lettres anglaises et françaises*, ed. Alexis Tadié (Nanterre: Presses universitaires de Paris Nanterre, 2010), available online <<http://books.openedition.org/pupo/991>> (accessed on 03 novembre 2022)

²³ Malcolm, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 192 n.12.

schools.²⁴ As Du Verdus was educated at a gentlemen's *académie*, then at a Jesuit *collège* in Bordeaux in law and philosophy, it is unlikely that he was exposed to the English tongue during his formative years.²⁵ A few months later, in October 1656, querying Hobbes about some passages of chapter 32 of *Leviathan*, "Of the Principles of Christian Politics" and suggesting translations of some polemical exegeses, he misses some elliptical constructions and misreads or mistranslates major theological concepts, such as "to purchase," which he translates as "purchasser," (to chase) and not "racheter" (redeem).²⁶

It is perhaps just as well that Du Verdus never translated *Leviathan*. Letter 100 of November/December 1656 reveals the mountain that Du Verdus would have had to scale, had he fulfilled his wish to translate *Leviathan*. In this letter, he sends to Hobbes a series of phrases and sentences that he fails to understand throughout the work. His linguistic incompetence is only matched by his enthusiasm, but we suffer for him when he asks Hobbes to explain "of late," in the phrase "a saying of late not understood." Foreign speakers of English may be more sympathetic when he stumbles on such words and phrases as "uncouth" or "for ought I know." Not even his scientific knowledge can help him to guess at such a central notion as "endeavour" in Hobbes's thought, as he fails to grasp the meaning of "fromward," whereas Hobbes's psychophysics of appetites and aversions relies on endeavours *toward* or *fromward* objects.²⁷ The Latin version was to use *conatus* as an equivalent.

Nonetheless, Du Verdus is making considerable headway into the acquisition of English and the translation of *Leviathan*, as in his New Year's letter a few weeks later,

²⁴ Baddeley, in her introduction, *passim*, refers to Bellot and Sainliens as making a living by teaching and publishing language manuals, which suggests that demand for private tuition was strong in Elizabethan England. All over Europe, Latin remained the core of language education.

²⁵ Malcolm, *Dictionnaire*, vol.1, 750.

²⁶ Letter 94, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 322-3.

²⁷ Letter 100, *ibid.*, 346-7.

he offers Hobbes his translation of chapter 4, on language, which Hobbes annotated and even corrected, showing a serious knowledge of French in some cases.²⁸ Hobbes's corrections, as far as we can guess them from Du Verdus's remarks on them, open a window into the intellectual dialogue that Hobbes maintained with his continental admirers.²⁹ The translation is far from bad, though many shades of meaning still elude Du Verdus, either because he missed elliptical constructions, or because he did not get subordinations right. In a style like Hobbes's, these are terrible things to misunderstand.

The same letter tells us a lot about the translator's limitations in English: when he stumbles on the notions of sacerdotal kingdom, or royal priesthood, he does not seem to realise that in the corresponding *De Cive* chapters he was translating, or had recently translated, he understood similar passages so well that he even used them in his address to the young king, though he was careful not to publish his translation of the relevant chapters. One may object that the dedication was composed later in the decade, but by then Du Verdus had kept praising *De Cive* to Hobbes in his letters for some time. Or was this a mere linguistic issue? Was this possibly some kind of self-delusion? In the self-fashioning of a translator in illiberal cultures, ideological caution is of the essence.

The printer's note to *Elemens* explains that Du Verdus had been struggling against abusive guardians and caretakers since infancy, and that his life was ruined by constant litigation against people who intended to rob him of his very wealthy estate. This is confirmed by the biographies of him, and by several passages from his letters to Hobbes, whom he seems to have taken as confidante. How sympathetic Hobbes can have been, we shall never know, as no letters from Hobbes to Du Verdus have been discovered. In the letters to Hobbes, many of which seem to have gone astray, or may have been intercepted by the authorities on one side of the Channel or the other, Du

²⁸ Letter 108, *ibid.*, 397-412. This is evidence that Hobbes had received and read the letter in which the translation was enclosed and that he had annotated it. Such evidence is frequently absent.

²⁹ Letter 108, *ibid.*, 402-412.

Verdus discusses Hobbes's philosophy and science (especially his mathematics that he defends against Wallis), he heaps hyperbolic encomia on Hobbes, and (metaphorically) leans on his shoulder to report his litigations.³⁰ A much tortured man indeed. His last letter to Hobbes, in March 1674, about a year before his death, was still deploring the dispossessions that he was bullied into by his enemies.³¹

Religiously speaking, he belonged to the Catholic branch of the French Southwestern nobility. He took the lowest rank of the major orders in the Church, sub-deacon, as a pledge to a relative that no heir of his would claim the land that Du Verdus bequeathed to him, as major orders required a vow of celibacy.³² His letters are brimming with pious interjections, he mentions praying God for Hobbes, sometimes even sounding so sanctimonious that it might have aroused exasperation or embarrassment in his English reader. Yet, his response to Hobbes's debunking of what was called "priestcraft" by James Harrington is enthusiastic in the extreme.

Nevertheless, his truly held religious beliefs are far from enthusiastically Catholic: indeed, in his letter to Hobbes of New Year's Day 1657 (*stilo novo*), Du Verdus suggests to Hobbes that he'd like to have the support of "Messieurs de la Religion," viz. of the Protestants, for which he asked Hobbes if he can put him into touch with the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, "Seigneur Protecteur," to whom he intended to dedicate his book... but which one? The *Leviathan* he was discussing with Hobbes, or his *Elemens*, that he had finished? And how could he fail to understand that, politically, Hobbes was not the best person to act as middleman between a Catholic foreigner and Cromwell? Du Verdus was clearly not accurately informed of the political circumstances of Protectorate England. In the same vein, as he had just reported to his correspondent, the quarrels raised against him by a priest and a convent, it is revealing that he immediately seized upon the occasion to praise Hobbes

³⁰ Letter 78 of April/March 1656 contains a brief autobiography, followed by a mathematical discussion: *ibid.*, 248-54. About the loss of letters, see Letter 68 (20 August 1654), *ibid.*, 194.

³¹ *Correspondence*, vol.2, 736-9.

³² Malcolm, *Dictionnaire...*, 751-2.

for his critique of the Catholic doctrines of the eucharist as sacrifice and of the real presence, expressing views favouring the notion of the eucharist as memorial. He seldom misses an occasion to satirise the Jesuits in subsequent letters, as in August 1664 when he calls them “Nos Druydes du Royaume des Ténèbres,” in a clear allusion to Part IV of *Leviathan*.³³

II. ADAPTING OR TRANSLATING?

In letter 75 of December 1655 already quoted, Du Verdus claims that he intends to produce a real French text that would at the same time be an accurate version of *Leviathan*, not the sort of paraphrase that Hobbes disliked, hoping that he hadn't missed the meaning:

Cependant je puis vous assurer que cette version est françoise et qu'elle est fidelle: je veux dire qu'elle n'est point paraphrasé qui est ce que vous condamnés ce me semble en quelque autre; que la diction y est pure, point figuré, gardant par tout le caractère de vos expressions; et ce qui étoit nécessaire pour la rendre telle que je n'y ay rien traduit sans l'avoir bien étudié, et si je ne me trompe sans l'avoir bien entendu.³⁴

But Du Verdus also lyrically expands on his translation of *De Cive* in 1656. Still complaining about the impediments caused by litigation crises, he compares his translation choices with those of Sorbière, and expresses joy and satisfaction at the work already done:

Qu'il est beau ce Livre là! et que je l'ayme! Toutes ces tramasseries qui me flestrissent cruëlement le corps l'esprit et les biens m'ont tellement occupé depuis six mois que je n'avais pas trouvé un quart d'heure de loisir pour en comancer la version. Je l'ay comancée depuis la My-May et sui savant du titre du Comandement Imperium Mr Sorbière dit l'Empire. Mais que j'y ai de satisfaction! Et que j'y passé volontiers les jours et les nuits! Aussi Monsieur j'oseray vous dire (et cela sans vanité) j'en fais un Chef d'œuvre; je rends précisément mot pour mot dans le meme sens et le tour françois y est;

³³ Letter 108, *Correspondence*, vol. 1, 397-402; against the Jesuits, seven years later, see letter 163 of New Year's day 1664, *Correspondence*, vol.2, 588-590; and for the last jibe, Letter 168, *ibid.*, 624.

³⁴ Letter 75, *Correspondence*, vol.1, 217/223 for Malcolm's translation.

on n'a point encore vu de telle version en France; sur ma parole vous ne vous plaindrez pas d'y avoir esté paraphrasé.³⁵

Hobbes had complained to Du Verdus that the English translation of the *De Cive*, the *Rudiments of Law*, of 1650, was more a paraphrase than a proper translation. Du Verdus shared Hobbes's concern with the accuracy of language, the choice of clear and appropriate words, and after all, did he not send to Hobbes a copy of his translation of chapter 4 of *Leviathan*, on speech? His ethos as translator was seemingly to give Hobbes a French voice matching his Latin or English style.

Present-day translators of Hobbes, would certainly not claim with Du Verdus that their translations are “un chef-d'œuvre” in the modern sense, *i.e.* a masterpiece, but if we mean by that, as Du Verdus must have, the sort of piece produced by an apprentice to be received *compagnon* (journeyman) in his corporation, this could be easily admitted. In any case, they would all concur with him when he writes “je rends précisément mot pour mot dans le meme sens et le tour françois y est,” namely, that we want to convey the whole accurate meaning of the original text from the source language into the target language in order to produce a linguistically consistent text in that one. Respect for the source *and* the target, however, is an ideal that was not shared by all early modern translators. What Du Verdus called “le tour,” the turns of phrase, belongs to what would now be called “the voice” by some theorists of translation: some of several parameters that a translator must define to give his or her author their specific tone in a different language. Translators should not substitute their own voice to their authors', but create for them a voice of their own in the language they translate into. This passage from the first chapter of the translation can give us an idea of the French ‘voice’ that he designed to replace Hobbes's Latin one:

Et ce sont là nos délices, en toute société : et l'on s'y porte par nature, je veux dire par affection et inclination naturelle, jusqu'à ce qu'à force d'accidents qui en arrivent, ou de préceptes qu'on nous donne, l'appétit du présent se trouve émoussé par la mémoire du passé, y ayant même force gens qui ne s'en corrigent jamais. Et sans tel divertissement beaucoup de gens ne parleraient que peu ou point qui sont fort diserts en ce genre.³⁶

³⁵ Letter 84, 24 May 1656, *ibid.*, 283/286.

³⁶ *Elemens*, I.2, 4; *DCiL*, 91. This passage concludes Hobbes's remarks on self-opinion and judgmental speech in society with a witty comment on men's joy at

The tone sounds very much like what can be read in the “caractères” literary mode, though the latter was to develop in the next thirty years. In terms of accuracy, the translation may not be fully satisfactory from a twenty-first-century point of view, but all the shades of meaning are present. However - and this is a major weakness - the reasoning is re-ordered, which is a serious departure from Hobbes’s usually carefully constructed arguments.

The French traductologist Antoine Berman called this dimension of translating “l’auberge du lointain,” a hotel for who has travelled from afar: translation must be a space wherein the translator allows enough elbow-room for the ‘other’ to feel at home, allowing the target-language and culture to be modified by this hospitality.³⁷ As Du Verdus’s political presentation of *De Cive* to his king shows, he did expect some change in the political mentalities of his fellow-subjects, based on the political assumptions and conclusions of Hobbes. A foreigner’s thought couched in the lingua franca of scholars was domesticated into the French language, in the political and ideological context arising from the change in the practice of government that the king of France was imposing after the rebellion of the nobility in the *Fronde*.

His other claim, that he had not translated any item from *Leviathan* without first checking that he had understood everything, is an unfortunate overstatement as regards his abilities in English. But one gets the impression that he was a more natural reader of Latin: his endeavours were more felicitous at times, than Sorbière’s, whose translation was more ponderous, though his translation is the one that crossed the centuries.

It is not irrelevant to compare a few telling points between Sorbière’s *De Cive* and Du Verdus’s. First, the titles point out a difference of perspective on Hobbes’s

criticising each other. For a modern English translation, see Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (eds), Cambridge: CUP, 1998, 23.

³⁷ Antoine Berman, *La Traduction et la lettre, ou l’auberge du lointain* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).

philosophical project. The original is entitled: *Elementorum Philosophiae sectio tertia De Cive* in the first edition, and *Elementa Philosophica De Cive* in subsequent ones, but Sorbière chose to translate neither of the two, and called his work of 1649 *Le Citoyen, ou les fondements de la politique*.³⁸ He focussed on the sheer content of the book, not on the overall philosophical project of his English friend. Du Verdus on the other hand retained an allusion to the insertion of this book within the general design of its author, including Hobbes's intended reference to Euclid's *Elements*. "Éléments" and "fondements" (foundations) do not carry the same echoes in the philosophical idiom. Having exchanged with Hobbes on the three parts that he was translating, he was obviously more inspired than Sorbière by the grand design of their mutual friend.

In one of his letters, Du Verdus himself points out to Hobbes another difference: he calls the second part, *Imperium*, "Le Commandement," not "Empire" as Sorbière had. The *Rudiments* of 1650 had chosen "dominion," which is a better English rendition of *Imperium* than "Commandement" (command) in French.³⁹ On this point, Sorbière was closer to the mark.

When more technical issues are at stake, Sorbière is also more relevant:

De Cive II.4: Quid sit jus relinquere, quid transferre

Du Verdus : Ce que c'est que laisser un droit ou s'en départir, et quoi le transporter

Sorbière : Ce que c'est que retenir, et que transférer son droit.⁴⁰

Du Verdus's marginal note uses a couplet to translate *relinquere* (giving up). Sorbière surprisingly contradicts the meaning of the same verb when he translates it by "retenir," which means "to retain." On the other hand, by the end of II.4, Du Verdus is

³⁸ *Le Citoyen ou les fondements de la politique*, Simone Goyard-Fabre (ed.), (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1982): henceforth *Citoyen*. In English: "the citizen, or the foundations of politics."

³⁹ Letter 84 (May 1656), *Correspondence*, vol.1, 283; *De Cive. The English Version*, ed. Howard Warrender, Complete Philosophical Works of Thomas Hobbes vol. III (OUP, 1984), 85; *Citoyen*, 139.

⁴⁰ *DeCiL*, 100; *Elemens*, 16; *Citoyen*, 104 ; *On the Citizen* doesn't translate the marginalia; it means "what giving up a right, or transferring it means."

much more concise than Sorbière, though the latter chooses an explanatory paraphrase that may prove more useful to lawyers:

De Cive II.4: Exempli causa, si qui fundum suum alteri vel vaenum vel dono dederit, sibi soli ius in eum fundum, non aliis item adimit

Du Verdus: Par exemple qui vend ou donne son fonds, n'ôte qu'à soi et non à autre le droit qu'il a sur ce fond.

Sorbière: Par exemple: si quelqu'un vend ou donne sa terre à un autre, il en quitte le droit, mais il n'y fait pas renoncer tous ceux qui y auraient des prétentions.⁴¹

Sorbière is ambiguous, since the argument bears on transferring a particular right to a particular other person, but at the end of the paragraph he seems to suggest that others than the person to whom the transfer is intended could still pretend to it. Yet, the reading found in *Elemens* is confirmed by paragraph 5 of the same chapter: “sive ad quemlibet transtuli; nam causa propter quam uni dare volui, in eo uno est, in caeteris non item,” where Sorbière is right: “La raison pour laquelle je le voulais donner à celui-ci, ne se rencontre pas en tous les autres.” In §5 he translates *translatio* by “transaction.” The one who transfers the right is called “transacteur,” a technical legal term. Du Verdus, whose legalese is less formally technical, prefers the more literal “transporter” (to convey) for *transferre*, a term also occasionally used by Sorbière.⁴² Therefore the central concept of Hobbes’s theory of covenanting, transfer of right, does not seem as stable in French, if we consider the choices of our two translators.

But if we compare the two translators’ backgrounds and strategies, we may get an idea of who they were translating for. When he translated Hobbes, Sorbière was still Protestant, and acting in the Hague, where he lectured and tutored, in connection with particular Protestant currents like the Remonstrants.⁴³ He came from a very influential Huguenot family, was considered for a career in the ministry, but some of his personal

⁴¹ *DeCiL*, 100; *Elemens*, 17; *Citoyen*, 104; *On the Citizen*, 34-35: “For example, if a person passes his estate to another by sale or gift, he deprives himself (though not others) of his right to that estate.”

⁴² *DeCiL*, 101; *Elemens*, 17; *Citoyen*, 104; *On the Citizen*, 35: “for the reason I wished to give it to one particular person lies in him alone and not in others.”

⁴³ Franck Lessay, “Samuel Sorbière”, *Dictionnaire...*, 2, 2013-18.

tenets on salvation would have made that difficult. He left the faith in 1653 to convert to Catholicism, remaining close to Hobbes, but he then found himself more on the margins of the *République des Lettres*, compared with his position of the 1640s. The juridical language of his translation seems aimed at a readership of professionals, rather than at a more general public.

On the other hand, Du Verdus uses a less technical vocabulary, and his prose sounds nimbler than Sorbière's, giving the impression that his style had been influenced by Hobbes's English voice in *Leviathan*, though it seems unlikely, given his weak knowledge of the language. If we accept Skinner's analysis of Hobbes's shift in writing and composing method between *Elements of Law* and *Leviathan*, the tone chosen by Du Verdus in the mid-to-late 1650s reflects a similar option: addressing the politically sensitive and active part of the nation.⁴⁴ His tone sometimes harks back to another major Bordelais author, Michel de Montaigne. His use of punctuation and the free flow of clauses suggest a different intended audience from Sorbière's, no less educated, but not an audience of professional scholars. Du Verdus's targeted readers might have been men who were involved in administration or politics, or had their own affairs to manage, in a kingdom that was only just recovering from the disorders of the *Fronde*, particularly in Bordeaux where Du Verdus had been of the pro-royal party. Like Hobbes on his own side of the Channel, our translator wanted to persuade those involved in the life of the kingdom at a political level, of the foundations of sovereignty and obedience. Du Verdus's agenda was clearly absolutist.

III. THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION, OR IDEOLOGY AT WORK

With the rebellion known as *La Fronde* the kingdom of France was torn by civil strife, between 1648 and 1653. It was a conflict between, on the one hand, the sovereign courts of Paris and several provincial towns, like Bordeaux whose *Parlement* only submitted in 1653, and the crown on the other, during the minority of Louis XIV. Among other features, this *Fronde* was a conflict between the absolute concept of

⁴⁴ Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), 351-6; the theoretical issues are outlined in those pages, but the whole book is dedicated to an in-depth scrutiny of Hobbes relationship to rhetoric, its theories and its culture.

royal authority that had developed since Henri IV, through the reign of Louis XIII, and under the regency of Queen Anne his widow, and Cardinal Mazarin. The crown was showing no sign of loosening its grip on any other authority in the kingdom, so that the declarations of the *Parlements* against the management of affairs by the crown and its regents encouraged protest. The outcome would be the control of the nobility by the king, and the concentration of sovereignty in the crown.

In this light, the insistence of Du Verdus on having Hobbes's absolutist views taught throughout the kingdom takes on another significance.⁴⁵ This also reflected Hobbes's obsession with having his doctrine taught in schools and universities to prevent what he called in chapter 29 of *Leviathan* "the poison of seditious doctrines." This was definitely a major development of Hobbes's project, several times formulated in *Leviathan*, and foundational in *Behemoth, or the Long Parliament*, written in the 1660s; yet, it already appeared as a major concern in the preface to the readers, and then in chapter 12 of *De Cive*. Hence, we could conclude that Du Verdus's translation choices are inspired by Hobbes's later orientation towards persuasion. Another conclusion at this stage, is that Du Verdus not only tried to domesticate or accommodate to French political culture Hobbes's English thought as formulated in Latin, but also to adapt his friend's philosophy of 1642 or 1647 to the post-*Leviathan* French State. In the *Elemens*, as in *Leviathan*, both the linguistic strategies and the political context were central in deciding the shape of the book. In 1651, *Leviathan* tried to confront the challenges of the political situation of the Commonwealth, as in 1660 the *Elemens* offered solutions to cope with the new, post-*Fronde* regime.

In Du Verdu's published version at least, Hobbes was not allowed by his translator to debunk in French the academic and religious authorities as he had in the third part of the original. The additional notes already mentioned are referred to, but not published. Their purpose, as already suggested,⁴⁶ was to add examples and complements to the main argument. Some, like the note on mutual fear, challenged the Aristotelian and scholastic assumptions of the average educated reader, and could have shocked the religious authorities, some of which had been involved in litigation against Du Verdus

⁴⁵ *Elemens*, "Épître au Roy," sig. á iii r^o-v^o.

⁴⁶ See note 9 above.

for several decades. But the notes might also have revealed some of the author's and translator's scepticism. Pyrrhonism might appear to challenge authority (religious, academic and political), whereas the purpose of the translation was to promote the absolute power of the sovereign.

Hobbes's developments on the sacerdotal dimension of kingship in the omitted 3rd part of *De Cive*, based on the Old and New Testaments, could be embarrassing for Louis XIV, as it could support his Gallican view of power, which he might not have wanted to see openly theorised and recommended to him: it could betray his claim to dominion over the clergy in his kingdom. But Hobbes and his translator could also be in trouble for publishing and dedicating to the king views on God that challenged orthodoxy, and a political exegesis of Scripture that promoted an anti-papal view of the relations between Church and State. This form of self-censorship, in no way uncommon in the seventeenth century, is compensated for by other strategies, visible in the parerga to the translation.

Indeed, the absolutist and politico-theological arguments are shifted by Du Verdus to the dedicatory epistle to the king. The tone is flattering, as it ought to be, but some of the arguments are phrased in the firm tone of absolutist hobbism. All the arguments given to the king in favour of his absolute sovereignty and of his right to teach the right doctrines in religion and politics to his subjects, can be referred to *De Cive*, even to the part that was omitted. The arguments on the vanity of men's passions come from the first part, and the need to keep them all in awe (as *Leviathan* puts it) are under the influence of the first chapters of *De Cive*. Hostility to the teachers of false doctrines comes from chapter 12 of *De Cive*;⁴⁷ the arguments on the High Priests as God's true vice-regents (after *Exodus*, 19 and *Numbers*, 27), and on the biblical kings like David and Solomon taking on priestly authority at the expense of the High Priests, come from part III of *De Cive*.⁴⁸ Interestingly, Du Verdus's argument follows

⁴⁷ *DCiL* 12, 192-4 ; *Elemens*, 181-4.

⁴⁸ *Elemens*, "Épître au Roy", sig. á iii-iv/*DCiL* 16, 244-6 ; *Elemens*, "Épître au Roy", sig. é iii-iv/*DCiL* 16, 246-8 ; *Elemens*, "Épître au Roy", sig. é iii v°/*DCiL* 17, 257.

the structure of the section on religion: the dominion of God, what it was under the old covenant, then under the new one. In many ways, this epistle is an epitome of the less acceptable dimension of *De Cive*.

What seemed too hot to handle, as it were, in the body of the text, is nonetheless expressed in arguments directly addressed to the king as advice. The posture adopted by Du Verdus is a classical one for an heir to a family of the parliamentary nobility: he must have thought that he could dare to act as a councillor to the king, having proved himself loyal to the Crown in the days of the *Fronde* and of its Bordelais embodiment, *l'Ormée*, in June-July 1653.⁴⁹ The September 1653 royal privilege, affixed to *Les elemens*, to print *La Sagesse des Anciens*, was a royal gesture of the regency authorities towards a loyal man who was known to be otherwise in trouble, but here again the correspondence between our translator and his author provides a key: in Letter 68 of August 1654, Du Verdus mentions having translated the Bacon work the previous year. The publication project had therefore made progress, as a privilege had been applied for and granted.⁵⁰ What eventually got published was not about the philosophy of science, but on a much more pressing issue: the absolute power of kings. Addressing the young king, now out of his minority in 1660, was a gesture towards a figure that the translator deemed capable of efficiently leading the State, especially if he chose the right kind of hobbist counsellors. So, probably, Du Verdus was currying favour with the mightiest of the mighty.

Sorbière, on the other hand, had to justify his translation. He appended to his book a “translator’s notice,” “Avertissement du traducteur”.⁵¹ In this ironical text, he insisted on a certain number of reasons for translating Hobbes, and *De Cive* in particular. He starts with the ironical or hypocritical reason, that he published this translation to

⁴⁹ On the whole issue of *L'Ormée* in relationship to the Cromwellian government in Britain, see Olivier Lutaud, *Des Révolutions d'Angleterre à la Révolution Française - Le tyrannicide & Killing no murder* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973).

⁵⁰ Letter 68 (20 August 1654), *Correspondence*, vol.1, 194.

⁵¹ *Citoyen*, 357-63.

provide French wits an opportunity to object to it. The reason he most mentions is the author's moderation in religion and ecclesiastical policy: to Sorbière, Hobbes must be praised to have proposed a single article of faith to be believed by all Christians, the *unum necessarium*, "Jesus is the Christ".⁵² His subsequent debunking of religious dissensions in the Catholic and Reformed Churches challenges the reader, since Hobbes cannot be regarded as the apostle of *tolérance* that Sorbière portrays.

Then, answering a personal attack, Sorbière explains why, though the citizen of a republic, he translated a book that spoke so strongly for monarchy. His answer is that Hobbes does not seem to disregard the government of several men, "le gouvernement de plusieurs," and that some of his English objectors blame him for the covenant he describes as the foundation of monarchies as of all other regimes. He objects that Hobbes's full endorsement of the royalist cause in the years leading to the king's execution speaks for itself: Charles I had been executed in 1649, the very year Sorbière's translation was published.

Sorbière was responding to attacks from Dutch and Huguenot critics, from within the *République des Lettres*. In contrast Du Verdus addressed the new king for three main reasons: he needed support in his many litigations, and who, better than the king, could provide this? Then, he regarded it as his duty, as a gentleman from a parliamentary family, to act as a royal adviser. Last, he had found in Hobbes a theory of the State and of the extent of royal power that could enable the new king to prevent the return of such crises as the *Fronde*. Whether Hobbes's view of Catholicism could serve Louis XIV clearly was the source of some concern for Du Verdus. Hobbes's view of the unity of temporal and spiritual power could indeed serve the monarch, but his anti-catholicism was definitely perilous.

CONCLUSION: TRANSLATING IN AN AGE OF CULTURAL MUTATION

⁵² *Citoyen*, 361-2; *DCiL* ch.18, the last of the book, is about what is required to enter the kingdom of Heaven; the arguments for the *unum necessarium*, "Jesus is the Christ," are on pp.285-7; *On the Citizen*, 239.

Leaving aside the selective nature of Du Verdus's book, how can its obscurity be explained? Du Verdus was a Catholic loyalist, a fully-fledged absolutist, an honest translator, everything to match the sociological and ideological criteria of France. So why is it that the best-known translation of *De Cive* has been Sorbière's? Being everything he was, meant that Du Verdus was not the right man in the right place, in the gaze of the *République des Lettres*, considering the international intellectual context. Sorbière was this man: Hobbes's secretary, sometime based in the Netherlands, the very hub of printing, intellectual and textual exchanges in Europe, and a place of greater freedom of expression than other countries of the Continent. At the time he translated and edited Hobbes, Sorbière was a Protestant in a Protestant node of the network of the said *République*, in the right place to promote his translation to posterity. Add to this that he was personally much closer to Hobbes than Du Verdus, so his credentials to the *République* were better. Du Verdus could not lean on the same communication network as Sorbière: his *Elemens* had only two printings in 1660 and one in 1665.

These case studies also raise broader questions regarding the growing competition between Latin and the vernaculars in the expression of philosophy. Bodin's *Six livres de la République* were available in French in 1576; Bacon either wrote in Latin and had his works translated into English, or the reverse (as with the *Essays*, which were partly translated by Hobbes into Latin). But Descartes published his *Discours de la méthode* in French only, in 1637, and as we have seen, there was a real feeling of emergency behind the projects to translate Hobbes's Latin and English works into French. Literary translations and adaptations from romance languages were many in both English and French, and vernacular philosophy was spreading throughout Europe in vernacular translations, while the Latin medium remained important to the international dissemination of ideas. Yet, if we try to read these phenomena through the lens of current theoretical research on translation, we may find new ways to understand this moment in the cultural history of Europe.

Two recent francophone books in the philosophy of translation have insisted on the contemporary global competition between languages to resist the domination of 'Globish' (a flattened international version of English), but more generally, to

renovate the relations between the former colonial languages (like French) and those of the formerly colonised peoples. Scholars like Barbara Cassin in *Éloge de la traduction*, and Souleymane Bachir Diagne in *De Langue à langue*, describe translation as the pacifying medium that can create a space for exchange and recognition.⁵³ Translation can become the language of the world, far beyond Umberto Eco's oft-quoted adage about translation being the language of Europe. The peoples opposing dominant languages (or languages by which they feel dominated, which amounts to the same in terms of cultural experience) can impose a "horizontal" mode of translation between, say, Wolof or Peul, and French, on equal terms.

Among mid-seventeenth century thinkers like those discussed in this paper, use of Latin may have begun to feel like the domination of their thinking capacities by a technoclect, *viz.* a professional idiom imposed by the academic tradition. Latin still prevailed in the universities of Protestant countries, as a consequence of the dominion of the Catholic Church and theology that used to control universities in the Middle Ages. Translating each other's works in each other's languages, which might sound in retrospect like the loss of a mutual (maybe a 'universal' language) was at the same time (though they may not have felt it this way) a means of breaking free from a self-centred academic tradition, and of generating, through translation, a public sphere for intellectuals all over Europe. In each society, it was also a device to bridge the gap between that part of the wider reading public interested in the development of ideas and knowledge, and the world of scholars. A new shared world of interaction was being opened, thanks to translation.

⁵³ Barbara Cassin, *Éloge de la traduction. Compliquer l'universel* (Paris: Fayard, 2016); Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *De Langue à langue. L'Hospitalité de la traduction* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2022).