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CLASSICAL TRANSLATION AND POLITICAL SURROCACY

*English Renaissance Classical Translations
and Imitations as Politically Coded Texts*

Overview

One of the great virtues of the modern Western state is said to be its demarcation into public and private spheres, the latter characterized by great commercial and cultural vitality. It is a model that has proven surprisingly transportable, to the New World through colonization and to the Third world by emulation. In the fluid politics of the post-Cold War world, privatization and the creation of civil society have become catch cries of campaigning democracy in new efforts at state-building in the republics of the former Soviet Empire. But the new nationalisms raise all sorts of questions about political obligation and compliance that we can best address by looking more carefully at modern state formation in its initial phases. Why, for instance, did citizens acquiesce to the concentration of state power that characterizes modernity? How did political institutions regulated by law produce juridical subjects with rights and duties who were nevertheless capable of resistance and revolution in cases of perceived injustice? The answer lies at the juncture of humanist

and juridico-political discourses. It involves a specific historical narrative.¹

Early modern political theorists came to a juridical solution to the problem of political obligation by a circuitous route. The great plate shifts of modernity were possible because of the receptivity to change of great masses of people in a relatively ordered way so that they not only salvaged much of their past but were able, under the new order, to give it new meaning. This demanded great shifts in how historical agents saw themselves, and the preparedness to think different thoughts, to respond to different and constantly changing institutions and yet somehow draw their collective histories with them. Great modern revolutions in Europe, the Americas, China and South East Asia managed to accomplish this feat; and they did so by discourses of persuasion that made of their cultural heritage a seamless web. The point of this project then is to advance our understanding of how these tectonic plate shifts were accomplished, the mentalities required to fit subjects for their historic roles, and how the creation of a reading public contributed to this task.

Modernity, in its early phase, as literatures generated by Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas and Reinhart Koselleck have claimed, is associated with two mutually dependent phenomena: the rise of print culture and the rise of the nation state (Foucault, 1980; Habermas, 1987; Koselleck, 1985). Print culture created from a disaggregated mass the first modern reading “public” (Anderson, 1983). But how did it do it? The power to write and the capacity to read are bridges across the void between the expectations of rulers and those of the ruled. For all that has been written about social change, very little attention was given until recently to how great social movements translate into the power of individual agency. Print culture unlocked the past, at the same time opening up great vistas into the future. This is why the civil wars and revolutions of antiquity gave us flashes of modernity. It is not by accident, for instance, that English Jacobean courtiers on the cusp of modernity, looking across to the Continent with premonitions of civil war, scoured their classical texts for omens of what was to come and ways of dealing with it by reading Lucan and Ovid as well as Virgil and Homer. In fact, after the Bible, what rolled off the printing presses of early modern Europe were classical translations and imitations of Greek and Latin texts, forma-

tive in transmitting theories of state management and notions of citizenship. By the localization of texts hitherto associated with “universal” imperial culture, they succeeded in creating a cosmopolitan vernacular.

This project aims to test the hypothesis of a nexus between nationalism and the rise of vernacular print culture, by analyzing a specific universe of canonical texts: translations and imitations of classical Greek and Roman works undertaken by the great Renaissance humanists of the early modern age. The literary merit of these translations, on which critical analysis has tended to focus, is less my concern than a conceptual analysis of notions of human agency, the scope of political actors to effect change, free will and determinism, the relation between leadership and followership, the virtues of citizenship and prerequisites for leadership, problems of freedom and democracy, premonitions of unrest and civil war, and the problem of political order – the conceptual armoury of modern citizenship.

The now ubiquitous hypothesis on the convergence of the rise of nationalism and the emergence of a cosmopolitan vernacular has engaged major contemporary European figures, Foucault (1980), Koselleck (1985), and Habermas (1987) in debate. Although apparently universal in its sweep, the claim about the nexus between nationalism and print culture was initially restricted to European contexts. Even Anderson’s claim that print culture created from a disaggregated mass the first modern public had specifically European referents. But a growing body of literature is beginning to extend the thesis into non-Western fields. Although this is the topic of hot debate among Sanskrit specialists, for instance, there seems to be considerable evidence for a wave of vernacularization accompanying proto-nationalist movements that swept not only through Latin Europe, but also through the Arabic-speaking, Sanskrit and Sinitic empires from West to East Asia and the Subcontinent” from roughly 1000 to 1500 AD, in what Sheldon Pollock has termed “the vernacular millennium” (Pollock, 1998; Wittrock, 1998). Comparative studies have shown how the vernacularization of the Sanskrit Mahabharata, other foundational epic and dramatic material, contributed to the development of regional consciousness in India (Subrahmanyam, 1998); and how Chinese Literary academies func-

tioned as centres of opposition to the court from at least the Ming dynasty, creating the conditions for a limited civil society (Wakeman, 1998).

Although I am in no position to evaluate the claims of a convergence of nationalism and print culture in what Pollock has claimed to be “the vernacular millennium”, it does not surprise me that the thesis should have application to non-Western as well as Western states. The main alternative hypothesis, that the modern state is specifically Western, due to particular exigencies of the development of capitalism, namely the Industrial Revolution, and the preparation of a skilled working class for its role (Gellner, 1983), has always seemed to me wildly teleological and implausible. To dismiss cultural artefacts as epiphenomenal, especially in the case of social movements which have specifically sought literary and aesthetic instrumentalities, seems to me perverse. It is only by careful empirical examination of the relevant artifacts that we can test the hypothesis. Moreover, assumptions underlying Gellner’s argument and those of the majority of theorists of nationalism, that this is a peculiarly modern and Western phenomenon, leave unexplained the fact that from its very inception the modern state depended on cultural syncretism. If we ask what in fact rolled off the printing presses of early modern Europe we find that they were mainly “exotic” works, the Bible and translations of classical Greek and Roman texts. Multiculturalism is no post-modern add-on. Print culture had the power to absorb any exotic culture that could be translated, fashioning out of these elements a cosmopolitan vernacular, universalist in its sweep. This universalism enabled the Western state to incorporate non-Western elements, Near Eastern religions and social forms very early. This is a story that I have told elsewhere, and that I believe must take center-stage in the account of Western identity formation: it concerns the struggle waged between the East and West for the mantle of the *polis*, a story whose immediate outcome was the victory, at least temporary, of the West (Springborg, 1986, 1987, 1992). Only by understanding the role of cultural syncretism are we also able to understand how non-Western societies of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, many of them subjugated by imperial conquest, have been to absorb Western elements and make them their own.

This project will try to answer these questions by addressing a print culture in which the translation and recirculation of classical texts was specifically designed to assist in the fabrication of national identity – that of Great Britain. Processes of collective identity formation and civil rights developed there were repeated in modern state building processes transported to the New World, including America and Australia. Moreover, they appear to parallel the vernacularization of imperial, cosmopolitan literatures that accompanied proto-nationalist movements in non-Western states, like India, the Middle East and Asia, as area specialists have established.

In short, we can begin to answer my question about how a civic “public” was created as a precondition for modern citizenship, by consulting material culture – in this case by examining what in fact rolled off early modern European printing presses and the specific political content it transmitted. It takes only a moment’s reflection to see that, given the devotion of scarce resources in a strategic environment, the convergence of early modern print technologies and the choice of material to disseminate could not have been accidental or dictated by amusement. The world’s great rare book libraries – the British Library, the Bodleian, the Herzog Auguste Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, and the Huntington Library in Los Angeles – house hundreds of volumes of unedited early modern texts in print and manuscript form, whose publication in critical editions is indispensable for any systematic study of the origins of modern citizenship.

Out of this vast array of material, surprisingly little attention has been given to early modern classical translations, produced in great number and often the work of foremost literary figures of the English Renaissance (but see Norbrook 1984, 1993; Grafton & Jardine, 1990; Jacob & Raylor, 1991; Sharpe, 1993; Zwicker, 1993; Skinner, 1996). I am thinking in particular of the translations of Homer by George Chapman and Thomas Hobbes, of Virgil by John Dryden and Alexander Pope, of Ovid by Christopher Marlowe and George Sandys, and the translations of Lucan by Arthur Gorges and Thomas May. Attention to the formative role of specific classical translations and imitations in the development of modern concepts of citizenship can inform broader issues: for instance, the widely commented

upon correlation between the delayed development of vernacular print culture and the failure to produce a modern “public,” which thwarted the development of civil society in Hapsburg Spain and its legatees in Latin America (Perez-Diaz, 1998). Spain’s development stands in marked contrast to the vernacularization of cosmopolitan culture in the Indian sub-continent and Arabic-speaking West Asia. And yet political processes in these latter countries did not give rise to democratic citizenship based on participation either. In other words, the vernacularization of imperial cosmopolitan culture to create a reading public of a critical size is the necessary but not the sufficient condition for the emergence of modern forms of political agency and citizenship.

A cautionary note is in order. Objections may be made to my use of the terms, ethnicity, identity and nationalism as anachronistic. I am fully aware of the now well-entrenched view that nationalism is a quintessentially modern phenomenon (see Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1986, 1991, 1998, 2000). However, it is a view that I challenge. To the same extent that the significance of phenomena like classical translation and political surrogacy may fall victim to disciplinary and curricular compartmentalization between “moderns” and “greats,” so do phenomena like “nationalism” and “the state”. Not only did antiquity know large-scale state systems with wide-ranging political, administrative, and fiscal competence, which precisely inspired the fledgling nation states of the European Renaissance; but it also knew the techniques of national consciousness-raising and propaganda in service of the state cult, popular resistance based on ethnicity, and crowd control in its many manifestations. This thesis it has been my purpose to develop elsewhere (Springborg, 1986, 1987a, 1987b, 1992, 1993).

Thesis: Classical Translation and Political Surrogacy

The European Renaissance, that great flowering of the arts and sciences, is curiously bereft of political and philosophical treatises apart from a few isolated examples like the mirrors for princes of Machiavelli

and Guiccardini, Thomas More, Richard Hooker and Thomas Hobbes. But in fact we have been looking for them in the wrong places. In a world of harsh censorship and draconian punishments for unorthodox political views, Renaissance courtiers chose drama, poetry and the visual arts to reach their political audiences. Lest such a statement appear too voluntarist, it must be pointed out that in lands where literacy was restricted, oral and visual performances, sacred and secular, were the accepted vehicles of public communication. Sacred or secular, these vehicles were highly differentiated in terms of intended audience, and comprised sermons, emblem books, royal processions and performances, masques and music, opera and epic, celebratory coinage, architecture, murals and frescoes, sculpture and even gardens (see Jacob & Raylor, 1991; Claydon, 1998). Moreover, as a consequence of the long tradition of manuscript culture preserved by the monastic orders, universities and the great libraries, the melding of ancient texts (religious, as well as cosmopolitan and imperial), to a local vernacular did not seem strange.

The invention of printing signaled a Renaissance Europe obsessed with the production of canonical texts. First the Bible, then vernacular translations of the Greek and Roman classics rolled off the presses of early modern Europe, accompanied by a furious debate about the relative merits of print as opposed to scribal publication.² Was it safe to broadcast book culture to the masses, or should it be the closely circumscribed monopoly of those involved in the circulation of manuscripts? The very issue of print culture was too dangerous to debate openly, usually discussed obliquely in diatribes about rivers – which turned out to be those on which printing presses were located – the banks of the Thames where the thriving London book trade was located; or the Main, site of the famous Frankfurt book fair.

But why among these precious early books should classical translations have featured so large? Very few scholars have thought to look at these translations for their wider political significance.³ It has passed unremarked, for instance, that major literary figures and political theorists, canonical in their own right, invested great time and effort in classical translations that have rarely seen the light of day since. So, for instance, Christopher Marlowe undertook to translate the great Hellenistic classical writers, Ovid and Lucan, although thwarted by the Stationer's Register, who would not allow publica-

tion on the grounds of sedition. Thomas Hobbes, author of *Leviathan*, a foundation text of modernity, which the author intended to be the Bible of modern politics, but which almost earned him the hangman's noose, began his writing career by translating Thucydides and concluded it by translating Homer. John Dryden, who besides being a prolific Restoration poet, and who with William Davenant rewrote so many of Shakespeare's already canonical plays, also undertook the translation of Virgil. For what purpose was this great effort to bring the Greek and Roman classics to a wider popular audience?

It is my thesis of this project that the great spate of Renaissance classical translations and imitations represent works of political surrogacy in an emergent nationalist discourse. For reasons of censorship in a harsh literary environment, but also because this is how people expected to get their information, certain classical works, for instance, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, were read as coded texts. The educational curriculum of Renaissance and early modern public schools designed to educate courtiers, often of humble background, required the thorough knowledge of a closed universe of classical texts. Some of these texts, transmitted from antiquity with the epistemological and ontological baggage which Christianity borrowed, were superfluous to, and even seditious of, its purposes and those of fledgling Reformation states. Draconian in their punishment of political or religious unorthodoxy, these states closed off overt forms of political discourse which were displaced into the aesthetic realm of poetry, drama and epic history. Ever inventive in their search for instruments by which to ply their trade, upstart courtiers found to hand a body of texts which covered the political spectrum from Greek and Roman classical republicanism to Hellenistic imperialism, of which they were the masters due to the peculiar monopoly on the distribution of knowledge that court politics accorded them.

The great epics of Homer, Hesiod, and later Virgil, like the stories of the Old Testament, to which as belonging to the great Eastern Mediterranean Epic cycle they bear a family resemblance, were stories about the rise and fall of empires, and the founding of small nation states, Chosen People of the Gods. Designed to be read aloud on state occasions, they also told of ancient cosmologies, the crea-

tion of the earth, everything above the earth and under the earth, and so provided cosmic justifications for kingship. But as they began to attract a body of competing works, especially those of the Hellenistic and Alexandrian schools, they also opened up spaces for allegorical political critique. The choice of text, whether apologetic or critical, and the undertaking to translate it, represented a political statement, not without risk in a political environment in which texts were scrutinized for sedition by the Stationer's Register, if not for treason by the Secretary of State. So surrogate political discourse sought relatively innocent vehicles for satire in what was to become a long tradition, imitated by Refusniks under twentieth-century repressive regimes.

Like the Bible, classical translations could be scissored and pasted to create new works that were pastiches of their coded messages, so that mere mention of a motif, for instance the seduction of Mars by Venus, or the triumphs of Hercules, conjured up a world of discourse. These motifs flew out of the texts themselves and onto the walls and ceilings of villas, public buildings and palaces, where they were visual reminders of epic events in the founding of nations. An entire repertoire of politically freighted motifs was transferred from Greek and Roman classical texts to the walls of Renaissance town villas and country houses, only to be re-recorded in a series of "painting poems" by poets who addressed their pictorial representations, and no longer the texts themselves. Or they found their way into music, masques and opera for visual representation on the stage. They included Homeric images of the fall of Troy; Virgil's depiction of the foundation of Latium; accounts of storms at sea as metaphors for the Ship of State in the works of Virgil, Ovid and Lucan; pastoral images of a settled, shired and cultivated countryside of shepherds, and sheepfolds safe from the proverbial wolf, from Virgil's *Eclogues*; reminders of corruption and intrigue in the dreaded halls of the siren Circe's house and Calypso's palace in Homer's *Odyssey*; Horace's reflections on the virtues of city and country life; and Martial's epigrams depicting the relation of the city to the countryside in time of war.

Gentlemen and nobles who undertook the Grand Tour further disseminated these images through imitation. So, for instance, the great Italian painter Annibale Carracci decorated the Villa Farnese in

Rome with motifs of colonization and tyranny: Hercules the bringer of civilization who kills the Nemean lion and the multi-headed beast, was shown facing off against the cave-dwelling Cyclops, Polyphemus (see Dempsey, 1995). Images of Hercules, Polyphemus and the cave were repeatedly played out in the three-dimensional semiotics of grotto construction in Roman imperial and Renaissance gardens. The labours of Hercules represented the pacification of the warrior spirit by the arts of civilization, just as Circe and the land of the Lotus Eaters were idioms for the poisons of priestcraft. These motifs found their way to the walls and grottos of Chatsworth and Bolsover, exhibition houses of the earls of Newcastle and Devonshire, the latter Hobbes's patron, whose children he escorted on the Grand Tour on several occasions. They are important motifs in Hobbes's long neglected literary works, his country house poem, *De mirabilibus peccati carmen*, his *Historia Ecclesiastica*, and his translations of Thucydides and Homer.⁴

My proposal is to produce critical editions with commentary of major English Renaissance works of classical translation or imitation as policy manuals usually overlooked by political theorists and historians because of their literary form. The works chosen have a peculiar unity due to two factors. Firstly, they are works of the client poets and dramatists whom James I gathered around him to fabricate a national identity for Great Britain, newly formed by the Union of England and Scotland. And secondly, there is abundant manuscript evidence to suggest, not only that these poets and political theorists knew one another, but that they belonged to University clubs which met frequently for an exchange of views in the form of after-dinner speeches, poems and plays. The idiom of this table-talk is the same Neo-Latin and classical discourse of the interlocutors' published works, where Virgilian tropes of the Underworld and the struggle of the Titans functioned as idioms for political opposition and sedition.

Contributors to James I's nationalist project included royal historians and new scientists, court poets and dramatists, as well as members of the Virginia Company who were merchant adventurers and colonizers. The poets laureate, Ben Jonson and William Davenant, possibly Shakespeare, and certainly the chorographers Camden and Speed, were primary architects of the project. But less well known

are the contributions of Michael Drayton, John Donne, Thomas Carew, Thomas May, George Chapman, Edmund Waller, and the humanist Hobbes. Hobbes was an associate of the poets laureate, Ben Jonson – whose advice he sought for the Dedictory Preface of his translation of Thucydides – and William Davenant, whose long and tedious nationalist poem *Gondibert* is prefaced by an essay on poetics drawing on Hobbesian sensationalist psychology, to which Hobbes replies. And in the forums of the Virginia Company, that important political school for imperialists, Hobbes joined the poet and playwright brothers Sandys, the playwright brothers Killigrew and John Donne, all active members.

Modeling themselves on the great Roman imperial clients, Horace, Ovid, Virgil and Livy, these English humanists believed in the power of poets to discipline the court. Obsessed with dynastic instability and their own volatility, they engaged in a court discourse which formulated a deliberate program of political pacification which included heroic poetry for the elite, masques and operas for the masses. It is no accident that translations of Homer and Virgil should be chosen vehicles for public policy. George Chapman, in the royal epistle dedicatory of his celebrated translation of Homer, pointed out to James I that it was not without reason that the Ptolemies read Homer as a manual for kings, which he should look to himself. Thomas Hobbes's translations of Homer, on the other hand, present a pacific plain-speaking world as a model for English society that illustrate his stipulations about "significant speech" in *Leviathan* and *De Cive*, his celebrated political treatises considered so seditious in his day.

George Sandys's *Ovid* and Thomas May's *Lucan* also represent significant interventions in court discourse conducted between members of this coterie. Five or more English translations of Ovid were completed between 1590 and 1632, which include those of playwrights such as Arthur Golding, Christopher Marlowe, and John Dryden, and George Sandys, whose textual apparatus is by far the most elaborate. Sandys began his translation on the hazardous Atlantic crossing on the way to his post as newly appointed Treasurer of the Virginia Company in 1623, as its minutes record, "amongst the roering of the seas, the rustling of the Shroude and the clamour of the sailors." Once in Virginia he completed it, taking the manuscript back with him to England, where it was published in 1626

and republished in 1632.⁵ It is believed to be the first work of poetry in the English language written in the Americas.

Why did a Virginia Company official in transit to the New World under such difficult conditions feel compelled to labour at such a task? Why were these pioneers of the English theatre and fabricators of the nation engaged in the translation of Ovid at all? Because Ovid was foremost representative of the foundation myths of the Greeks, colonization stories onto which the discovery and settlement of the New World could be grafted. In tropes of mutability and metamorphosis, Ovid posed the problems of cosmic generation, genealogy and identity, epistemic and categorial questions that lay at the heart of new national identities under construction. At the same time he transmitted the stories of cosmic battles between gods and heroes that had, from time immemorial, provided legitimacy for kings.

Lucan's *Pharsalia*, by contrast, chronicles the descent of the Roman Republic into civil war and tyranny under warring consuls, to produce a courageous critique of Nero's court. The *Pharsalia* which secretes a prophecy of successful tyrannicide into the heart of its ritual and formulaic praises of monarchy, was a Renaissance text for republicans.⁶ Among its early translators and publicists, Christopher Marlowe was accused of outright sedition and Milton, whose *Paradise Lost* is indebted to Lucan, of revolution. Hugo Grotius, the political theorist to whom Hobbes owes much, was said to have always traveled with a copy of Lucan in his pocket, urging Dutchmen to read the Spanish-born, Roman Senator and tyrant-hating poet, against the current Spanish king. In 1613 Grotius was received in London as a Dutch republican and the following year Sir Arthur Gorges produced his translation of Lucan's *Pharsalia* with commendatory verses by Sir Walter Raleigh, Gorges' friend, already languishing in the Tower for his irreverent comments about princes in his *History of the World*.⁷ Thomas May's *Lucan* lies even closer to the heart of this surrogate Jacobean court discourse. Published between 1626 and 1627, it was dedicated to William Cavendish, Earl of Devonshire, Hobbes's patron. Its publication date, like that of Sandy's *Ovid*, coincides with that of Hobbes's country house poem, *De Mirabilibus Pecci Carmen*, presented to his patron as a New Year's Gift in 1627.

Thus the literary works of Jacobean poets and dramatists covered the entire political spectrum and were by no means confined to sup-

port of the court. Clients of the great baronial class, these poets wrote estate poems celebrating in a pastoral mode the great spate of country house building in the wake of the dissolution of the monasteries. Enlisted to write archaizing poems in the manner of the great Roman client poets, Virgil, Horace and Ovid before them, English bards immortalized the Neo-classical piles built by a local aristocracy in imitation of the Roman senatorial oligarchy, to create facts on the ground. One of the purposes of this project is to demonstrate that the country house phenomenon has significance beyond the architectural and artistic feats of its patrons. It represents the consolidation of a baronial class vying with the Crown for political power in the early modern state, and holding it to account by the model of the Roman Republic. In this way country-house poetry of the English Renaissance conceals a discourse about the relative merits of Imperial, Catholic and cosmopolitan culture versus local, vernacular and “Gothic” traditions. Localism inserted itself as a defense of vernacular, anti-court and anti-city pastoral and sometimes in the struggle for control of texts. Much of the impact of Renaissance Neo-classical art and architecture is left unexplained if the role of classical translations as foundation political texts is not understood. Taken together, textual, pictorial and architectural Neo-classical works created a richly textured fabric to which the local and vernacular were seamlessly melded. Quite why and how the European Renaissance succeeded in disseminating this classical idiom so widely – first in Europe, and then to the non-Western and New Worlds – still defies explanation, despite a voluminous literature.

Wider Significance

The great Renaissance spate of translations and retranslations, as works of political surrogacy, offered spaces for reflection on systemic changes and the role of human agency. Humanist literary discourses, the employment of classical rhetoric, epic poetry and poetic history for a classically trained elite, music and masques for the masses, were instruments of persuasion deliberately mobilized to prepare political subjects for their historic roles. Only when the English Civil

war opened the floodgates of history did courtiers lose faith in their power to discipline the court and manipulate the masses. It was then that they turned to juridical solutions to the problem of political order in the form of Social Contract. This project aims to test the hypothesis of a nexus between nationalism and the rise of vernacular print culture by analyzing a specific universe of canonical texts: translations and imitations of classical Greek and Roman works undertaken by the great Renaissance humanists of the early modern age. The literary merit of these translations, on which critical analysis has tended to focus, is less my concern than a conceptual analysis of notions of human agency, the scope of political actors to effect change, free will and determinism, the relation between leadership and followership, the virtues of citizenship and prerequisites for leadership, problems of freedom and democracy, premonitions of unrest and civil war, and the problem of political order – the conceptual armoury of modern citizenship. This project seeks to place social contract theory back in context, as a politico-juridical solution to the problem of taming the masses crafted by humanists disillusioned with the power of poets to discipline the court, once the English Civil War opened the floodgates of history. It is designed to accomplish two tasks: (a) to test the received wisdom about the coincidence of the rise of nationalism and the emergence of print culture; and (b) to test it with respect to a specific universe of texts. It will treat English Renaissance translations and imitations of classical Greek and Roman works as a test case for the political use of print media.

Now some may say of this project that it runs into the very trap that it seeks to avoid: the disjunct between text-production, which assumes a literate public, and collective identity formation, which involves mobilizing the (mostly illiterate) masses. My response is that when state resources are put to work as part of a large-scale propaganda project, these problems tend to disappear. The proposed study focuses on the propaganda machine that James I of England, who was also James VI of Scotland, put together to create out of his two kingdoms a new entity: Great Britain. In this deliberately calculated effort, scarce resources were expended to furnish texts for wide dissemination that somehow could jump the literacy barrier, mainly by means of performances such as by reading aloud, or in the form of plays, masques and even operas. This was particularly true of the court

masque, which used ingenious mechanical devices and magnificent visual display to convey its political message (Holbrook & Bevington, 1998). This court-centred ideological exercise in collective identity formation included epic poetry as a form of political instruction for the elite. Epic poetry, a vehicle for the dissemination of the foundation myths of the peoples of Greece and Latium in the hands of Homer and Virgil, was always intended for wider dissemination, by being read aloud to the non-literate and by memorization.

This project involves primary research that has in fact been done before. No one has taken the trouble to ask why, after the Bible and certain devotional texts, translations of Greek and Latin texts should have been among the first items produced by the new printing presses of Europe. Nor has any one considered the sheer volume and duplication of these translations a matter of any significance. There are no works that systematically compare the translations – or compare them to the originals. It is acknowledged that the King James Bible and Shakespeare's works had the power to shape the vernacular speech of peoples as far afield as America and Africa. Yet very little thought has been given to the way in which translations of Greek and Latin works were capable of framing the political mentalities of a new reading public.

The degree to which early modern thinkers were preoccupied by empire and its exigencies is often forgotten in our enthusiasm for the modern nation state. Greek and Latin historians specifically addressed question about how great empires were created and the institutional means necessary to their survival. Livy, Tacitus, Polybius and their imitators come immediately to mind. Edward Said has persuasively argued in *Culture and Imperialism*, for instance, that the early modern novel was written against the horizon of global expectations of empire, as demonstrated even in the case of Jane Austen's novels, exquisite in their microcosmic settings. Much has been written about *Shakespeare and the Imperial Theme* (Knight, 1961; Greenblatt, 1980; Gillies, 1994), and the political contexts of Cavalier poetry and Restoration drama have been the subject of important literary studies (Norbrook, 1984, 1999; Zwicker, 1993; Sharpe, *et al.*, 1993; Raylor, 1994; Erskine-Hill, 1998). But much less notice has been taken of Neo-Latin poetry, while translations of Greek and Latin epics have been more or less ignored.

Little thought has been given to the structural position of the Renaissance courtier and the client poet, or why so many major political figures, members of the clergy and prominent citizens – for instance almost all the members of the Virginia Company in early modern England – were poets, often Latin poets. Even less attention has been given to the time spent by prominent political and literary figures in the translation of Greek and Roman texts. For instance the translations of Homer, Ovid and Virgil by Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, Thomas May, George Sandys, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and Thomas Hobbes, have been very little studied, assumed to be juvenilia, works of senilia, or something that prominent political and literary figures did on the side. One simply flourishes the term Renaissance Man, as if that settles it.

Hobbes, of all early modern political philosophers the most renowned, is known precisely for his politico-juridical solution to the problem of political obligation in the form of social contract. That he, of all people, should have devoted a substantial part of his life to book-length Latin poems, and translations of Thucydides and Homer, raises very important questions. Hobbes's Latin poetry had never hitherto been translated, apart from very free eighteenth century paraphrases, and one very recent Italian translation. Neither his Latin poetry nor his Homer exist in modern editions, or have attracted substantial scholarly attention (but *c.f.* Davis, 1997). And yet these are deeply political works, pursuing a deliberate court-centred policy agenda. Written in Neo-Latin, the coterie-language of Renaissance humanism, and intended for scribal publication, their disarming literary form disguises a degree of seditiousness that Hobbes dared not display in his print-medium treatises intended for general circulation, such as *Leviathan*.

Hobbes was also renowned for his theories of sensationalist psychology, famous in his day and employed for widely disparate purposes. Works as different as his patron, the Duke of Newcastle's manual on how to train horses, and his friend William Davenant's theory of poetics, drew on them. The latter, a disquisition on the power of the image prefacing Davenant's long and tedious poem *Gondibert*, was published together with Hobbes's lengthy rejoinder. In his preface Davenant acknowledges his debt to Hobbes's sensationalist psychology for laying the theoretical basis for social condi-

tioning, which his *Proposition for the Advancement of Morality* sets out to exploit. Addressed to Charles II, whom Hobbes tutored in his youth, Davenant's *Proposition* was designed to ensure public compliance to Royal policies by means of mass media events and carefully crafted image-management. So great was Hobbes's commitment to crowd control that, I believe, as I have argued elsewhere (Springborg, 1997), even his studies in optics were motivated as much by the desire to understand the mechanisms of image production and control, as by a commitment to the new science. Davenant's formula for political pacification comprised music and masques for the masses, and classical epic poetry (i.e., Virgil and Homer) for the elite. The translation projects of Hobbes and other prominent courtiers, may well have been a contribution to Davenant's programme. That this programme was based, with explicit acknowledgment, on Hobbes's psychology, as making possible the bridge between the mentality of the rulers and that of the ruled, is also highly significant.

Important recent theoretical work in the social sciences on the rise of modernity, if imaginatively applied, can bring the position of the Renaissance courtier into proper focus. This work, sometimes characterized by bold hypotheses and sweeping statements, nevertheless represents robust theory on the relation between the creation of a reading public and the emergence of civil society (see Foucault, 1980; Habermas, 1987; Magnussen, Heilbron & Wittrock, 1998). Early modern European translations and imitations of classical Greek and Latin texts, were formative in transmitting theories of state management and notions of citizenship. What they achieved was the creation of a cosmopolitan vernacular in service of the nation state. They did so by discourses of persuasion by which Renaissance humanists deliberately set out to meld indigenous elements of their cultural heritage to exotic elements in a seamless syncretic web (Kristeller, 1969). Greek, Roman and Jewish classics were read as policy manuals, which is why they were translated and imitated many times over. Translations, by convention very free in this period, varied widely in the way in which they transposed settings to satisfy different political agendas, each a rhetorical exercise in cultural syncretism for state purposes.

Post-modern discourse analysis has been particularly attentive to the status of texts as the most powerful evidence we have for the

past. In confronting this evidence historians must ask whether we have universal powers of translation, or whether universes of meaning may be closed off to us in the absence of direct or non-textual forms of access to an historical period. Although complicating the normal problem of textual translation by adding that of *re-translation*, this project also has the power to simplify it. For, Renaissance translations of widely known, and even widely translated, classical works can be measured against a foreign language control text, as well as other foreign vernacular translations with their own horizons of meaning. Difficult epistemological questions concerning different mentalities, how knowledge can be transmitted from one context to another, and to what extent we can enter the minds of those from another era, are all given specificity and some means of validation when addressed through translation. The adoption of consciously archaizing behaviour, in the textual, pictorial and architectural imitation of earlier aesthetic forms, is a particular demonstration of the possibility of such transmission in an age-old tradition. For, like the Romans and Greeks before them, Renaissance translators and imitators chose archaic forms to lend to their texts and monuments an antiquity that was deliberately faked up. What new messages are encoded in the transmission process is, of course, an intriguing question. Here too, the specific context for translations tells us that great deliberation went into the coding of these messages, that they were shaped for specific ears, and the fact that these works were eventually to become canonical was not by accident, but by design.

It is not my purpose to fall victim to the overschematization of complex historical processes of which I convict others. But an understanding of how the processes of modernity accomplished their task requires us to outline the grand projects and trace the institutional foot-prints and decision-making processes of policy makers, without whose industry and resources these changes could not have taken place. How it was that they produced, on the one hand, centralizing institutions of the state and political institutions regulated by law and, on the other, juridical subjects with rights and duties who were nevertheless capable of resistance. This is nothing less than the problem of civil society and the state, which looms so large in current discourse. But here is addressed in terms of material culture, specific agents and mechanisms of transmission and the analy-

sis of a closed universe of texts that allowed space for reflection on human agency, civic virtue, problems of leadership and followership.

The hypothesis that there is a correlation between the rise of nationalism and the emergence of a cosmopolitan vernacular, which this project is designed to test, has significance for New World and well as Old World, Third World as well as First World, social movements. If it is broadly true that the creation of an English-language vernacular belonged to a wave of vernacularization that swept the East as well as the West from 1000 to 1500 AD, a large question mark hangs over the received wisdom that nationalism is the hallmark of modernity and we are in a better position to understand the new nationalisms of post-modernity. This project will try to isolate the moment at which historical agents inserted themselves, with selected texts as their instruments, to bring about this effect.⁸

Notes

¹ It may thus contribute to the project on Collective Identity Formation jointly undertaken by the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences and the Berlin Wissenschaftskolleg.

² See Harold Love *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1993). Michael Drayton, author of the great chorographical poem that maps and shires England in allegorical verse, *Poly-Olbion* ([*Great Britain*] 1613), took the side of printing, for instance, against John Donne and Hobbes, who elected for scribal publication. Drayton opened his Preface to *Poly-Olbion*, thus:

In publishing this Essay of my Poeme, there is this great disadvantage against me; that it commeth out at this time when Verses are wholly deduc't to Chambers, and nothing esteem'd in this lunatique Age, but what is kept in Cabinets, and must only passe by Transcription.

Hobbes opened chapter 3 of *Leviathan* (1651), "Of Speech," by declaring that "The Invention of Printing, though ingenious, compared with the invention of Letters, is no great matter."

³ See especially the dialogue opened up by Glen Burgess, in his review of Conal Condren's *Language of Politics in Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1994), *History of Political Thought*, 12, 4 (1996), 632-9. Quentin Skinner's magisterial *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996) lays the groundwork for extensive treatment of

rhetorical and literary works as political. See the pioneering works by literary scholars: David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London, 1984); Kevin Sharpe et al., *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, 1993); *Poems on Affairs of State*, ed. George deF. Lord (2 vols, New Haven, 1963); and the exercise in textual archeology by Lise Jardine and Tony Grafton, 'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy (*Past and Present*, no 129, 1990, pp. 30-78), uncovers discrete readings of a classical author, for each of which the text is treated as a policy manual.

- ⁴ See the forthcoming editions of Hobbes's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Oxford, Voltaire Foundation) and his *De mirabilibus peccati carmen* by Patricia Springborg and Patricia Stablein (Reading: Whiteknights).
- ⁵ George Sandys, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Englished, Mythologized and Presented in Figures* (Oxford, 1632).
- ⁶ For the account of the reception of Lucan that follows I am indebted to David Norbrook, Lucan, May and Republican Literary Culture, in Kevin Sharpe et al., *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, 1993), p. 49, and Norbrook's *magnum opus*, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge, 1999).
- ⁷ Ben Jonson claims in *Discoveries*, to have written a section of Raleigh's *History of the World*. And Hobbes acknowledges having shown his 1628 translation of Thucydides, a work critical of demagoguery, to Ben Jonson, implicated in the same year over commendary verses to John Felton, the Lucan-inspired assassin of Buckingham the royal favourite. See David Riggs, *Ben Jonson, A Life* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), p. 300 and Norbrook, Lucan, May and Republican Literary Culture, p. 55.
- ⁸ It may thus contribute to the project on Collective Identity Formation jointly undertaken by the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences and the Berlin Wissenschaftskolleg.

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