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Translation and transnational history in the eighteenth century

Patrick Leech

While the nineteenth century in Europe is commonly perceived to be an era of nations and nationalisms, the eighteenth, by contrast, has often been approached from a transnational or cosmopolitan perspective, one that gives importance to the movement of people, goods, and ideas across national and geographical boundaries. Goldgar’s (1995) work on the ‘Republic of Letters’ in the early Enlightenment, for example, portrayed a community of scholars who carried out an articulate and elaborate transnational correspondence. A sense of a pan-European cosmopolitanism has also been considered to be a central ideal in later Enlightenment thought (Schlereth 1977; Scrivener 2007). Similarly, Jonathan Israel’s thesis, that there was an identifiable radical enlightenment whose origins were in the work of Baruch Spinoza (1632–77) and Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) that found full expression in the late eighteenth century and the revolutionary movements, has a strong transnational premise. Indeed, Israel’s intention is to reinstate ‘a sense of the European Enlightenment as a single highly integrated intellectual and cultural movement’ and to free historians from ‘the deadly compulsion to squeeze the Enlightenment […] into the constricting straight-jacket of “national history”’ (2001: v, vii; See also 2006; 2012). Other examples of historical inquiry that prioritize a transnational approach include work on the cultural interconnections between Britain, France, and Ireland during the eighteenth century (Andries et al. 2013; Thomson et al. 2010); Bailyn’s (2005) notion of the Atlantic as an identifiable area of historical study, given the strength of the interrelations in the space of the Atlantic in terms of demography (migration), economics (trade), and labour supply (slavery) (2005; see also Armitage 2002); and the idea of a single ‘Atlantic Revolution’, put forward many years ago but still discussed today, accounting for the revolutionary movements in America, France, the Low Countries, Ireland, and Great Britain (Godechot 1965; Palmer 1959; Albertone and De Francesco 2009; Clark 2018).

These transnational approaches, then, prioritize historical actors and activity that cross national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. As such, a particularly pertinent but hitherto under-researched area would appear to be that of translation. Whether discussing the cultural interconnections in Europe throughout the century, the challenges of shared enlightenment values radical or otherwise, the migrants from Europe who began to people the Americas, or the many connections between radicals and revolutionaries in England, France, and
America toward the end of the century, the ways in which these worlds interrelated and communicated necessarily included a significant amount of translation. In order to appreciate fully the dense nature of such interrelations, it is important to explore the mechanics and intricacies of these exchanges and the ways in which translation could bridge gaps in understanding (Bachman-Medick 2009: 11).

This chapter will focus on translation as an activity that pervaded the eighteenth century, in particular in those areas concerned to establish or reinforce a sense of transnational cosmopolitan belonging. The first part will look at some individuals involved in translation activity, usually themselves representing, in their lives and work, what we may call a cosmopolitan praxis. The focus on the ‘agency’ of translators and the particular historical context in which they were working has been the subject of much work in the field of translation studies recently (see for example, Delisle and Woodsworth 2012; Chesterman 2009; Dam and Korn ing Zethsen 2009) and is crucial to any understanding of why texts are translated: as Anthony Pym points out, only through working on ‘translators and their social entourage (clients, patrons, readers) can we try to understand why translations were produced in a particular historical time and place’ (1998: ix). This essay will take the example of Huguenot migrants and explore the ways in which some of them distinguished themselves as translators and the motives behind their work. The second part will consider translation as a vehicle for reciprocal intellectual influence in the Enlightenment. Recent studies have given significant weight to these interrelations and interfaces (see, for example, Hammersley 2010). Not always, however, has the activity of translation been awarded the place it deserves in these descriptions, although the work of Fania Oz-Salzberger (1995; 2006; 2014; 2017) stands out in this respect as does that of Kozul (2016) for the specific case of the French philosopher and collaborator on the Encyclopédie, Paul Henri Thiry, known as the Baron d’Holbach (1723–89). These two scholars have begun to illustrate how important translation was to the Enlightenment and how this was, moreover, quite clearly understood by many of the major protagonists, moved by concerns to universalize their new perspectives on knowledge. The third part makes some brief considerations regarding genre. It is important to widen the sphere of enquiry beyond the literary world, as it was not the only one in which there was significant translational activity. Other areas such as commerce and the production of news were also full of interlingual interactions that may not produce the finished texts that are the customary object of literary translation history but that constituted, nevertheless, regular everyday translational activity. The pervasive nature of this activity indicates the need to include these interactions fully in our considerations of translation history.

25.1 Huguenot translators

One of the most important and best-documented groups of migrants in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Europe was the Huguenots. Effectively expelled from France after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, large numbers of French Protestants joined their co-religionists in Switzerland, Britain, Ireland, and the United Provinces. The latter, otherwise known as the Dutch Republic, a confederation of seven provinces that had broken free from Spanish rule in 1581 and was characterized by a high degree of tolerance of religious differences, is particularly important for our present purposes, as its major cities, The Hague, Leiden, Rotterdam, but in particular, Amsterdam, were home to an important print industry (Eisenstein 1992: 1–32; Eisenstein 2005: 110). This highly literate diaspora often boasted linguistic competence in more than one language – in French, English, and Latin, and, in many cases, also in the different varieties of Dutch spoken in the United Provinces.
It is not unexpected, then, that this group, in particular, was strongly involved in activities of translation.

Some time ago, Goldgar (1995) provided an impressive overview of the ‘Republic of Letters’ in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that centred, in particular, on the book and review industry and its network of relations in Britain, France, the United Provinces, and Germany. This particular transnational movement, Goldgar argues, had as the principal objective of those involved the construction of a real transnational community of ‘letters’, through the exchange of ideas and practices, principally of the academies. Crucial to their activity was the publication, in Amsterdam, The Hague, Berlin and elsewhere, of reviews documenting, through abrégés (summaries), intellectual activity taking place elsewhere in Europe. This activity relied heavily on a new figure, she argues, the literary agent (Goldgar 1995: 35). Neither writers in their own right nor simply printers or typesetters, these new figures, many of whom were Huguenots, commissioned articles and published translated summaries of material originally published in other languages. The titles of some of the reviews published in this period in Amsterdam give us some indication of the extent to which this ‘Republic of Letters’ was transnational in focus and translational in methodology. The best known is perhaps the Nouvelles de la République des lettres (1684–1718) (News from the Republic of Letters) founded by the philosopher and critic Pierre Bayle, but the list also includes a number of reviews with titles that clearly betray their transnational mission: the Bibliothèque germanique (The German Library) (1720–59), the Bibliothèque anglaise (1717–28) (The English Library), the Journal britannique (1750–57) (The British Journal) and the Bibliothèque italique (1728–34) (The Italian Library) (Dictionnaire des journaux 1600–1789 2015–2019). A principal objective of these reviews was to keep their readership informed about publications abroad, and, to this end, they included short accounts of work in French, which were basically summaries in translation of the original works. Michel de la Roche (?–1742), editor of the Bibliothèque anglaise justified this orientation by writing in the first edition of the review in 1717, that

> you could say in general that English books are scarcely known outside this Island & those that are translated from time to time into French, or of which the Journalists speak, do not suffice to give a just idea of the state of the Sciences here today, nor to satisfy the curiosity of the Public.  

*(cit. in Goldgar 1995: 67)*

Similarly, Charles-Etienne Jordan (1700–45), the editor of the Bibliothèque italique, wrote that his review, providing extracts in French of works published in Italian

> can be nothing other than very advantageous for the public, because through this it will find itself informed about books which appear in Italy: we know but little the books which are published in this country [...].  

*(cit. in Goldgar 1995: 68)*

This transnational ‘Republic of Letters’ and the work of translation that underlay it was facilitated by the linguistic, scientific, and, we would say today, intercultural skills of those involved: the Huguenot migrants with their particular transnational history. De la Roche, for example, was born in France in 1680 and escaped to England at an early age, passing through the Netherlands where he briefly met the philosopher and writer Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) (Thomas 1976). Charles-Etienne Jordan, ‘one of the leading Berlin cognoscenti’, was a
former Huguenot pastor (Israel 2001: 694). Another typical mediator and publisher was Charles de la Motte (1667–1751), who was probably born in Montpellier, educated in Geneva, and arrived in Amsterdam with the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, where he resided from 1711 to 1751 (Goldgar 1995: 35). A number of minor figures, Huguenots working as editors, reviewers, or translators in the United Provinces and elsewhere have also been brought to light (Häseler and McKenna 1999; 2002; see also Leech 2020a: 25–58). In addition to these, two figures, in particular, stand out for their importance in the diffusion of English work in French in this period.

The first is the Protestant theologian, writer and editor Jean Le Clerc (1657-1736), who, after spending a brief period in London in 1682 where he preached in the French Huguenot church, returned to Amsterdam and dedicated the rest of his life to publishing, in succession, three philosophical reviews, the Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique (1686–93) (The Universal and Historical Library), the Bibliothèque Choixée (1703–13) (The Selected Library), and the Bibliothèque Ancienne et Moderne (1714–27) (The Ancient and Modern Library). These reviews were crucial vehicles for the exchange of ideas in the ‘Republic of Letters’ both because of their longevity and the quantity of material published, running to 19, 27, and 28 volumes, respectively, and because they included numerous abrégés in French of English ideas and works. Le Clerc, moreover, was a friend and collaborator of John Locke (1632–1704), during the latter’s period in exile in the United Provinces, and published, in translation, an early extract from Locke’s principal philosophical work, the Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), which was designed, in accordance with the philosopher himself, to test the waters in terms of the possible reactions to it on the continent (Golden 1972; Bots 1984; Israel 2001: 478–9).

The second is Pierre Coste (1668-1747), the translator of Locke’s Some Thoughts on Education (1690) and of the full translation in French of the Essay. Coste, too, was a Huguenot migrant, arriving in Amsterdam after fleeing from southern France and, subsequently, moving to London, sent by Le Clerc to work with Locke and later with the Whig potentate, the Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713). Coste’s translation into French of Locke’s Essay became the standard French language edition for the whole of the eighteenth century, as did his translation of another key work of the early Enlightenment, Isaac Newton’s Optics (Rumbold 1991; Thomson 2007; Mason 2002).

Further work on translators and their specific individual histories can enable us to go beyond a history of translation based exclusively on the analysis of texts and undertake what Theo Hermans (2003) has termed a ‘thick description’ of translation.2 This ‘thick description’ is conceptualized as a heightened attention to the specific historical determinants of the actions and motivations of translators, including not only literary and philosophical considerations but also a host of political, cultural, social, and economic aspects. A closer look at one Huguenot migrant and translator, Pierre Desmaizeaux (1745), may serve as an example.

The specific political context of the Huguenot migration, their expulsion from the absolutist and Catholic France of Louis XIV, is clearly of paramount importance in discussing the motivations behind Desmaizeaux’s career as publicist and translator. Desmaizeaux’s father was a Huguenot pastor who had fled to Switzerland in 1685 after being charged with sedition for a sermon attacking Louis XIV. Pierre Desmaizeaux left Geneva for Amsterdam and, subsequently, like Coste, for London, where he, too, came under the patronage of the Earl of Shaftesbury (Almagor 1989: 3–4; Zanardi 1998; Bots 2018). In this new literary environment in London, Desmaizeaux frequented not only moderate supporters of the new Whig monarch, William of Orange, the principal European opponent of absolutist France, but also more radical freethinking and republican figures, whose
work he promoted and translated for the Francophone milieu he had left. He worked tirelessly as a correspondent for the *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres* between 1700 and 1710, as well as for Samuel Masson’s *Histoire critique de la République des lettres* (Critical History of the Republic of Letters) (1712–18), the *Journal des Savants* (Journal of Learned) (1665–1792) and others, publishing accounts in French of works by a number of figures known for their deist, materialist, or republican views, such as John Toland (1670-1722), Matthew Tindal (1656-1733), and Anthony Collins (1676-1729) (Almagor 1989: 13; Thomson 2010). Desmaizeaux’s work in English also included extensive accounts of the rebellion against the Stuart monarchy in the Civil War and the new Protestant constitutional monarchies of William III and subsequently Queen Ann, such as Clarendon’s *History of the English Civil Wars* and Abel Boyer’s *History of the reign of William III* (1702), and *History of the Reign of Queen Ann* (1722), which Desmaizeaux suggested should be translated in full into French (Almagor 1989: 60–5). Desmaizeaux, and this may have been true for other Huguenot migrants as well, was thus involved in a concerted attempt to propagate, through translation, the particular Protestant, Whig, and liberal alternative to the absolutist monarchy in France that had expelled them.

The evident political context, however, should not lead us to neglect economic and cultural aspects relating to the Huguenot diaspora that may also contribute to a full understanding of the motivations of those involved in translation. Deprived of their wealth in France (Protestants were barred from inheritance), Huguenot exiles were adept at using their positions as intermediaries and their cultural and linguistic competence to generate income and for personal advancement. This was often not immediate: Desmaizeaux’s activity in his early period in London, from around 1710 to 1720, his biographer Joseph Almagor notes, provides no evidence of remuneration but, instead, may be seen as a period of investment in which he aimed at establishing his name ‘as a reliable source of information on English affairs […]’ (Almagor 1989: 80). It was, thus, a sort of apprenticeship period in which he managed to accredit himself with his English patrons and acquaintances and with Dutch publishers such as Bernard and Du Sauzet and put himself in a position, subsequently, to promote his own work. In 1714, he published his own translation into English of the work of the French essayist Charles St Evremond (1616[?]–1703), himself an earlier exile in London. Two years later, he published in French his *Vie de Bayle* (1716) (Life of Bayle) a life of the principal radical thinker of the Low Countries in this period, Pierre Bayle (Almagor 1989: 126). In 1720, he was rewarded for his summary of the debate between Newton and Leibniz, *Recueil de diverse pieces sur la philosophie* (1720) (Collection of Different Extracts on Philosophy) with election to the prestigious Royal Society (Grist 2010: 38).

Using their linguistic and cultural skills, as well as their capacity to forge and maintain links with two of the crucial centres of cultural production in the eighteenth century – London and Amsterdam – Desmaizeaux and other Huguenot migrants, were able, through translation, to promote the cause of the Protestant and radical philosophical world view that was antithetical to the absolutist Catholic milieu that had rejected them but also to forge individual literary careers.

### 25.2 Translating the Enlightenment

Translation was a central activity, then, to Huguenot migrants. As such, this is an example of the strategic importance of translation to people in movement, liminal figures inhabiting border or ‘contact’ zones (Pratt 2008/1992) who are brought naturally, as it were, to exploit their knowledge of different cultures and languages and to broker the exchanges between them.
We may look at translation also from the perspective of the movement of ideas. Much work has been done on the Enlightenment as a European-wide phenomenon. Porter and Teich’s collection of essays on the Enlightenment in national contexts (1981) was an attempt to wrest the Enlightenment out of its specifically Parisian aura, although the focus on specific national contexts left the transnational and interrelational nature of the Enlightenment somewhat in the shade (see for example, Porter 2000; Broadie 2001). Other work built on earlier studies, such as Hazard (1953/1935), and has considered the Enlightenment from a European perspective (e.g., Venturi 1989; Robertson 2005). In particular, Jonathan Israel (2001; 2006; 2012), in a number of impressive studies, has shown that what he calls the ‘Radical Enlightenment’, which he charts from its origins in the Low Countries to its development throughout Europe and, most recently, to America (Israel 2017), was clearly a transnational phenomenon.

There have also been some attempts to focus on specific issues relating to translation in the Enlightenment. Oz-Salzberger (1995), in particular, beginning from a focus on the translation of major works of the Scottish Enlightenment into German, has shown how translational strategies could affect, in an important way, the reception of these thinkers in Germany (Oz-Salzberger 2017). She has also shown how crucial translations were, more generally, to the circulation of ideas during the Enlightenment (2006; 2014). Here, following the work of Mladen Kozul (2016), we will focus specific attention on the circle of Baron d’Holbach in the 1760s and 1770s and, in particular, the extent to which this ‘coterie’ of radical thinkers relied heavily on translation as a means of propagating their ideas (see also Leech 2020b).

We may start with a brief mention of John Wilkes (1725–97). This radical English politician of the 1760s in England, scourge of the British establishment, and editor of the critical newspaper The North Briton, spent 4 years in France from 1764 to 1768 in order to escape arrest and imprisonment. In that period, spent mostly in Paris, Wilkes regularly attended the famous salon of Baron d’Holbach, which met every Thursday in Rue Royale (Kors 1976). One of the most radical texts produced by this ‘coterie’ was Nicolas Boulanger’s Recerches sur l’origin du despotism orientale (The Search for the Origin of Oriental Despotism) published posthumously by d’Holbach in 1761, probably with the assistance of Denis Diderot (1713-84) on the basis of Boulanger’s notes. The Recerches, according to Israel, was ‘the most comprehensively subversive underground publication to appear yet’ in terms of its attack on organized religion and the existing political order, as well as its ‘concerted assault also on the imperial structures of Asia and the Americas’ (2012: 132–3). Wilkes’s interest in this text resulted in his republishing it in French on his own press in London and subsequently translating it into English and publishing it with the title, The Origin and Progress of Despotism, in the Oriental and other Empires of Africa, Europe and America (1763) (Israel 2012: 134). Wilkes was also instrumental in commissioning and publishing the first translation into English, in 1767, of one of the defining works of the Enlightenment, written by the Milanese philosopher and jurist Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794). Dei delitti e delle pene (1764) translated as Of Crimes and Punishments (1764), a founding text of modern criminology and a striking example of the application of Enlightenment principles of justice and equity to the field of law. This translation, too, can be related to the d’Holbach circle. Wilkes had met the Italian writer Alessandro Verri (1741–1816) at d’Holbach’s salon and, through him, had become acquainted with Beccaria’s work. The French translation (which is likely to have influenced the English translation) had just been undertaken by Abbé Morellet (1727–1819), another member of d’Holbach’s ‘coterie’ (Loretelli 2017:13–18; Kors 1976: 44–6).
Wilkes’s activity as a translator and facilitator of translations from French to English is mirrored, on a larger scale, by that of d’Holbach himself. The Baron d’Holbach is principally known for his materialist *Système de la nature* (1770) (The System of Nature) originally published under the pseudonym of ‘Mirabaud’. Less well known is d’Holbach’s considerable activity as a translator, which has recently been the subject of a major study by Kozul (2016). D’Holbach distinguished himself early on, for example, as a translator of scientific works from German into French (Vercruysse 1971: vi) to the extent that his collaborator, Jacques-André Naigeon (1738–1810), claimed in his obituary of him that it is to him that we owe to a very large extent the rapid advances made by natural history and chemistry amongst us some thirty years ago; [...] it is he who translated the excellent works which the Germans had published on these sciences – sciences that were then almost unknown, or at least very much neglected [...] (cit. in Wickwar 1968: 49).

Other original work by d’Holbach was also, it might be argued, based on translation in the broad sense of work in one language being heavily dependent on texts originally published in another. His collaboration with Diderot on the *Encyclopédie* consisted of the contribution of a large number of articles on mineralogy and geology, many of which were heavily based on his knowledge of German texts in this area (Kozul 2016: 59–77). Even his best-known work, the *Système de la nature*, on which his reputation as a philosopher rests, was closely reliant on John Toland’s *Letters to Serena*, originally published in English in 1704 and that had appeared in d’Holbach’s translation in 1768.

Following his visit to England in 1765, in fact, d’Holbach had begun to translate a number of anticlerical or materialist works by English deists, atheists, and freethinkers of the early eighteenth century, such as Toland, Collins, John Trenchard (1662–1723), and Thomas Gordon (1691–1750). These translations, published anonymously and circulated clandestinely, are now acknowledged to have been by d’Holbach (Vercruysse 1971; Kozul 2016). Taken together, they represent an unprecedented attack on religious and political orthodoxy, as well as hierarchical values in religion and politics. Some of the titles of these works in their French translation (they were often collages of a number of different pamphlets and parts of works) give a sense of their polemical and anticlerical nature: *La Contagion sacrée ou Histoire naturelle de le superstition* (1768) (Sacred Contagion or The Natural History of Superstition), *Les Prêtres démasqués, ou des iniquités du clergé chrétien* (1768) (Priests Unmasked, or Some Iniquities of the Christian Clergy), *De la cruauté religieuse* (1769) (On Religious Cruelty), *L’Enfer détruit* (1769) (Hell Destroyed) and so on. This flurry of translations culminated in the publication in French of Thomas Hobbes’s materialist work, *Elements of Law, Natural and Politic*, first published in 1640, and translated in 1773 as *De la nature humaine*. The extent of the attack on the orthodox clerical establishment was underlined by Diderot, who wrote to his mistress, Sophie Volland, in 1768, that it was ‘raining bombs in the house of the Lord’ and that ‘every day when I get up, I look out of the window to see if the great whore of Babylon is not already pacing the streets, her great cup in her hand’ (cit. in Furbank 1992: 292). The radicalism and materialism that Israel (2001; 2006; 2012) has charted in its spread throughout Europe, also contained, then, an important translational aspect.

Translation was also an important part of the work of other key figures of the French Enlightenment. A milestone in the Enlightenment was Voltaire’s *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) (Letters Concerning the English Nation), which, although not a translation, was an
extended commentary on English scientific and political thinking and the fruit of his reading during his period in exile in Britain from 1726 to 1729 (Porter 2000: 134–5). Diderot himself had begun his career as a translator from English, first of Temple Stanyan’s Grecian History in 1743 and, subsequently, in 1745, of the English philosopher the Earl of Shaftesbury’s Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit (first published in 1699). It is difficult to assess the impact of Diderot’s translation of this work, which was for many years a key text in English Whig philosophy and aesthetics in its promotion of ‘virtue’ and ‘natural affections’ and the search for public good, but Diderot’s interest in Shaftesbury (the translation added a number of his own footnotes and philosophical comments) is surely significant (Furbank 1992: 18, 25–6; Israel 2006: 785; Robb 1991). It is worth noting that the entire project of the Encyclopédie had its roots in a proposal by Diderot’s publisher, Le Breton, to translate Chambers’s Cyclopaedia, or universal dictionary of the arts and sciences (1768) into French, a proposal that was shelved in favour of an autochthonous French venture (Furbank 1992: 34–6).6 Many other members of d’Holbach’s unofficial ‘coterie’, seen by some as the heart of Parisian intellectual activity at the time (Kors 1976), also distinguished themselves as translators. Abbé Morellet, as we have seen, was the translator into French of Beccaria’s Dei delitti e delle pene. Nicolas La Grange (1707–75), tutor to d’Holbach’s children, translated the important materialist work by Lucretius, De rerum natura (1767) (On the Nature of Things) as well as the works of Seneca (Kozul 2016: 20; Furbank 1992: 404). Friedrich Melchior von Grimm (1723–1807), the chronicler of the Parisian Enlightenment with his Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique (1753–1773) (Literary, Philosophical, and Critical Correspondence), translated a number of works by the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni (Furbank 1992: 183). Both Jean-Baptiste Suard (1732–1817) and Augustin Roux (1726–76), other members of d’Holbach’s ‘coterie’, were prolific translators: Suard was chosen by David Hume as his translator and was unsuccessfully solicited by Edward Gibbon to translate his The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776) (Hunter 1925: 113–4), whereas Roux collaborated with d’Holbach on his scientific translations (Kors 1976:175–93). If translation, as Kozul puts forward, was at the heart of d’Holbach’s work (Kozul 2016: 1), it played a considerable and, it would seem, somewhat neglected role in the work of all the members of the ‘coterie’ as well as that of Diderot and, as Oz-Salzberger has begun to show, the Enlightenment in general. More work on the translation of Enlightenment texts would help us track with more precision the ways in which ideas and texts circulated both within Europe and in a wider, global context, an increasingly topical and controversial area of study (see for example, Conrad 2012).

25.3 Genres and sites of translations

Our considerations of Huguenot translators and translation in the d’Holbach circle have focused on published translated texts. It is predictable that researchers, in their quest to identify translators and translations in the past, prioritize an activity whose traces are immediately accessible in the holdings in libraries and archives, in other words, for which a source and translated text can be clearly identified. But this should not blind us to the fact that there was, without doubt, a wealth of translational activity in the everyday lives of those who are the subjects of interest in transnational history – migrants, publishers, diplomats, entrepreneurs, and so on – whose activity has not been directly recorded. Oz-Salzberger rightly points out that ‘a vast and almost uncharted territory is the oral interaction between Europeans travelling across cultural and linguistic borders’ (2014: 47). She notes, for example, that German and French enthusiasm for English books was not only transmitted...
through publications but by word of mouth, through the accounts of the many philosophers, writers, and travellers who visited London. Moscow university professors, she points out, were teaching the thought of Adam Smith (1723–90) a hundred years before the Wealth of Nations was actually translated into Russian (Oz-Salzberger 2014: 47).

Another underdeveloped area is that of translation in reviews. The literary periodicals produced by Huguenot publishers and booksellers, as we have seen, aimed at providing an accurate portrait of the scientific and literary work originally published in England through the medium of French. In addition to the earlier literary journals produced by Huguenot publishers in Amsterdam, the Hague, Berlin, and elsewhere, we might add, as a further and later example, the Analytical Review, which came out in London from 1788 to 1798 published by Joseph Johnson (Scrivener 2007: 56–66; Braithwaite 2003: 86–9; Leech 2020a: 119–142). Every issue of the Analytical Review, which professed to be cosmopolitan and not national in outlook, contained an entire section entitled ‘Literary Intelligence of Europe’, which discussed the latest publications and debates in France and Germany. The work of the French Revolutionary Anarcharsis Clootz (1755–94), for example, La République Universelle (1792) (The Universal Republic), which was never published in full in English, merited a 1,500-word review that effectively translated its major points for an Anglophone readership (Scrivener 2007: 62). Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) reviewed foreign language works regularly, as well as publishing a number of translations for Joseph Johnson’s publishing house (Vantin 2018). The Analytical Review also played an important role in the English reception of Kant, with numerous reviews of Kantian writings in German academic journals (Scrivener 2007: 62–3).

The literary review, then, was an important site of cosmopolitan and translational activity. Less obviously, perhaps, newspapers too harboured cosmopolitan outlooks, foreign material, and de facto translations. The practice of reading newspapers has been recognized as a crucial element in the ‘imagination’ of a nation in the minds of its citizens (Anderson 1991/1983), but newspapers were also a source of much information that extended beyond the nation’s borders. Franco Venturi (1989) has shown, in detail, the extent to which Italian gazettes, for example, were full of information, gossip, and news relating to scientific, literary, and political events in other parts of Europe, including Greece, Russia, Bohemia, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, Geneva, France, Britain, and America. The radical Irish newspaper The Press, edited by the Irish aristocrat and United Irishman Arthur O’Connor (1763–1852), which came out during the Irish Rebellion in 1797–98, included a large amount of news relating to the activities of the Directory and the Napoleonic army in Italy as well as translations of extracts of works, such as the Ruins of Empire by Constantin-François de Chassebeuf, Count Volney (1757–1820), a work that was to become a touchstone for materialism and republicanism in the following century (Leech 2018). As Thomson and Burrows point out, material in eighteenth-century newspapers relating to events in other nations, necessarily involving translation, are a ‘rich and underexploited field’ in terms of the charting of translation and our understanding of the mechanisms by which information and ideas pass from one culture to another (2010: 14). The extent to which translation figures prominently in the quotidian practice of producing news is currently meriting particular attention in the field of translation studies (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009; Aragrande 2020; Zanettin 2021).

25.4 Conclusion

The work that has been carried out on translation in the radical milieu of the Huguenots, the diffusion of Enlightenment texts through translation, and the role of translation in the press has begun to highlight the ways in which ideas circulated in the eighteenth century, not
only through Latin or French as *lingua franca* but also, and crucially with regard to a less literate popular audience, through translation. This activity, which seems to have become increasingly pervasive in the later part of the century, may have been a crucial node in the ways in which radicals in France, America, and Britain exchanged and promoted ideas relating to and supporting the new ‘democratic’ revolutions (Jacob 2007: 11–12; Mucignat and Perovic 2018). The hypothesis put forward long ago of an ‘Atlantic’ revolution (Palmer 1959; Godechot 1965) and taken up recently by Jonathan Israel (2017) may find some confirmation in further research into translation in the 1780s and 1790s.

This chapter has attempted to chart some ways in which a focus on translation is a necessary correlate to any consideration of the many areas in the eighteenth century that involved transnational relations, understood to mean social and cultural exchanges that occur in a geographical and cultural frame not bounded by the emerging nation-states. I have sketched this in two areas – that of individuals involved in transnational and intercultural experiences, taking the example of Huguenot migrants and their activity as translators, and the often articulate and elaborate exchange of ideas, focusing on the example of the diffusion of a ‘radical’ Enlightenment through translation. I have also suggested that, if we are to appreciate the full extent of translation in this period, we need to look outside the literary and philosophical sphere and consider other channels such as newspapers and reviews through which the intellectual life of the time was fed by new ideas from abroad. We may add that this, too, is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the areas of lived experience that necessarily involved contact with other languages. This is particularly the case, for example, when we consider the ways in which the European economies began their colonial encounters. The slave trade and slave economies, for example, arguably the central economic activity of the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century, were necessarily interlingual as well as transnational. The whole area of northern Brazil, according to Bernard Bailyn, was a ‘linguistic cauldron involving Irish, English, Dutch, French, Portuguese, Spanish and “Gipsy” migrants as well as the communities of Arawak, Ge and Tupi speakers’ (2005: 71).9

The practice of history has customarily given special priority to what happens within the boundaries of a nation-state. However, this nation-oriented framework is unable to describe successfully much of the large swathe of historical experience that can be found on the margins, or outside the sphere of the nation altogether. This experience includes migration, literary exchanges, international diplomacy, trade, and colonial encounters – all of which presuppose contact between cultures and languages and, thus, inevitably involve translation in one form or another. An exploration of translation and translators is, then, a crucial part of any historical enquiry that takes transnationalism in the eighteenth century as its principal focus.

Notes

1 For a discussion of the term ‘transnational’ and the difficulties inherent in using it to refer to the period before 1850, see Bayley et al. (2006).
2 Cheung (2007) has charted the notion of ‘thick translation’, originally used by the philosopher Gilbert Ryle and taken up by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz and the cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah.
3 The Enlightenment was, of course, a highly variegated phenomenon that, as many commentators have pointed out, belies the use of the definite article, which, however, for the sake of simplicity, will be used throughout in this essay.
4 Fania Oz-Salzberger points out that this focus on the national context ‘runs the risk of underplaying interactions’: by starting from the premise of the nation, it may tend to ‘retrospectively impose nation-state-boundaries, largely non-existent in the eighteenth century’ (2014: 39).
5 For a discussion of the translation of Beccaria into Spanish during the liberal ‘triennio’ of 1820–1823, see Tonin (2017).
6 Diderot argued that to publish a translation of Chambers’ *Cyclopedia* would ‘excite the indignation of scholars and protests from the public, who would be receiving, under a new and pretentious title, riches that had already been in their possession for many years past’ (cit. in Furbank 1992: 36).
7 Even in Ireland, one of the first literary reviews to include significant material on European affairs was published by a Huguenot, Jacque Droz (Neill-Rabaux 2013; Sheridan 1999).
8 We may add, here, as an example of the cosmopolitanism of some of the press, the phenomenon of newspapers such as the *Courier de l’Europe*, a French language newspaper published in London (Burrows 2010).
9 Bailyn is quoting here from an unpublished paper by Kittiya Lee given at the Atlantic History Seminar at Harvard in 2004. I have been unable to trace the original.

Further reading


This volume collects a series of specific examples of the circulation of ideas first presented as part of a collaborative research enterprise on the exchange of ideas between Britain, France, and Ireland during the Enlightenment. Part One deals specifically with issues relating to translation.


This is a groundbreaking work that discusses the reception of English republicanism in France during this period through an attentive examination of the reciprocal influences of many of the major writers in this tradition from Shaftesbury and Toland to Mably and Marat.


This volume is an in-depth study of Baron d’Holbach work as a translator. It is fundamental and innovative in its focus on translation as an integral part of the work of an Enlightenment philosopher and for the ways in which, in the eighteenth century, translation was an integral part of the vast clandestine literature that circulated in Europe.


Oz-Salzberger is the first critic to focus specifically on translation as a neglected but crucial part of European Enlightenment culture, and this article is the best recent overview of the subject.


This volume contains essays by specialists revealing the wealth of exchanges in hidden international networks during the Republic of Letters, going beyond the notion of ‘influence’ and examining intermediaries and translators as well as gazettes, periodicals, and journals. One section is dedicated specifically to case studies of translations.

References


Translation and transnational history


