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Making the invisible visible: Raising student awareness of literary translation

Abstract

Translation studies emphasise the need for accurate literary translation, where the translation process, as much as possible, is seamless and invisible to the reader. This ‘illusion of transparency’—an effect that conceals the translator’s mediation of the translated text—potentially erases a sense of ‘otherness’ that readers may feel when reading a literary work in the source language. The invisibility of the translator also means that the role of the translator in the interpretation process has been,ironically,almost completely overlooked in literature subjects when texts originally written in languages other than English are read and discussed in English. As a result, the fact that literature students attempt to access another culture, society or belief system via a translation often becomes secondary to the literary theory or perspective used to analyse the literary artefact. This study discusses some of the strategies used in the classroom to raise student awareness of the theoretical and practical issues in reading a translated text to enhance students’ critical understanding of texts originally written in a language other than English.

1. Introduction

A translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer’s personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text—the appearance, in other words, that the translation is not in fact a translation, but the ‘original’. (Venuti 2008: 1)

A translation is like a pane of glass. The better it is, the less it will be noticed. It’s only the bubbles and flaws that make it visible, and that consequently attract the observer’s attention. (Shapiro 1997: xiii)

As the words of Lawrence Venuti and Norman Shapiro affirm, the desire for accurate, seamless literary translation, where the translation process, as much as possible, is faultless and invisible to the reader has long been perceived to be the ultimate goal of the translator. This means that literary analysis in world literature subjects is often guided by cultural and gender perspectives or post-colonial and other literary theories, while the role of the translator in the interpretation process has been, ironically, frequently overlooked. In other words, the idea that students are
attempting to access another culture, society or belief system via a translated text becomes secondary to the literary theory or perspective applied in analysing the literary artefact. For the continued survival of language majors in the current climate of budget restrictions and the cutting or reduction of language programs, it is not uncommon for culture and literature subjects to be taught in English, in order to access a larger student cohort.¹

Such is the case with a subject I frequently teach, *Literature and Society in Renaissance Europe*, a core requirement for students majoring in French, Italian and Spanish, and open to English literature students. In *Literature and Society*, students read works in English by Petrarch, Boccaccio, Machiavelli, Rabelais, Montaigne, the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes*, excerpts from Cervantes and poetry from Italy, France and Spain. During the six years I have taught *Literature and Society* I found that few students—neither language majors nor monolinguals—recognised on a deeper level that they were, in fact, reading a translated text; as a result, students also gave little, if any, consideration to what reading a literary work in translation meant in terms of the analysis and reception of the text. In short, the literature read in English afforded students an “illusion of transparency” (Venuti 2008: 1)—the effect that conceals the translator’s mediation of the text, thus potentially erasing any sense of ‘otherness’ that readers may feel when reading a literary work in the source language.

Why, one might ask, would raising awareness of reading a translated text be necessary, when critical theory offers so many avenues to study and analyse literature? In a world of increasing interest in ‘world literatures’, ‘global literature’, and ‘transnational literature’, I hope to show the benefits a “pedagogy of translated literature” (Venuti 1996: 331) can bring to the world literature classroom. Lawrence Venuti clearly identifies the advantages of bringing an understanding of translation to the literature classroom:

> Recognizing a text as translated and figuring this recognition into classroom interpretations can teach students that their critical operations are limited and provisional, situated in a changing history of reception, in a specific cultural situation, in a curriculum, in a particular language. And with the knowledge of limitations comes the awareness of possibilities, different ways of understanding the foreign text, different ways of understanding their own cultural moments. (Venuti 1996: 332)

The goal of this essay is to discuss some of the strategies I have used in the Renaissance literature classroom to raise student awareness of the theoretical and practical issues in reading a translated text. Three examples are provided here: comparing two different contemporary translations of the Boccaccio’s sonnets; tracing the censorship history of a tale from Boccaccio’s *Decameron* into English; and the evaluation of multiple English translations of a key sentence in the Spanish picaresque work *Lazarillo de Tormes*. My personal experience teaching with translated texts has shown that by expanding interpretation choices, students can better engage with the text as not only a product of the time, place and culture of its production, but also as a consequence of the time, place and culture of the translator and the receiving...
society of said translation. In my conclusion, I would also like to offer further advice, based on recommendations by Maier (2010) and Garayta (2010), on ways teachers of literature in translation can approach translated texts in the literature classroom, including some suggestions for selecting an appropriate translation, beyond the usual considerations of cost, availability and paratextual matter.

2. Reading poetry in translation

In *Literature and Society in Renaissance Europe* the class reads the sonnets of the Italian Petrarch, French Pléiade poets such as Ronsard and Du Bellay, and the Spanish poets Garcilaso de la Vega and Quevedo, amongst others. The decision to focus on the sonnet is deliberate, for several reasons: first, it is one of the most popular Renaissance poetical forms, perfected by Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) in the fourteenth century and admired and imitated throughout Europe. Second, the Petrarchan sonnet in Romance languages has a set structure (14 lines, divided into two quatrains and two tercets) and is composed with a strict rhyming and metrical scheme. Last, the sonnet’s form often guides the meaning, in that a question or problem is often posed in the quatrains, and a response or resolution is provided in the tercets. As a result, when studying the English translations, my students work together through the translated poems, focussing on the imagery, themes, the question posited by the poet and its resolution—in spite of most students’ inability (for those who know no Italian, French or Spanish) to reflect on the rhythm and metre in the original.

A translator of a respected collection of Spanish Golden Age poetry, Edith Grossman, when describing the challenges of translating poetry, highlights the special sonorous qualities, amongst several characteristics of verse, that a translator often endeavours to capture in the performance of poetic translation:

...although it may be universally human, the inescapable truth is that poetry can seem completely localized, thoroughly contextualized, and absolutely inseparable from the language in which it is written in ways that prose is not. The textures of a language, its musicality, its own specific tradition of forms and meters and imagery, the intrinsic modalities and characteristic linguistic structures that make it possible to express certain concepts, emotions and responses in a specific manner but no in another—all of these inhere so profoundly in a poem that its translation into another language appears to be an act of rash bravado verging on the foolhardy. (Grossman 2010: 93-94)

Mark Musa, translator of Petrarch’s poetic collection, the *Canzoniere*, likewise confirms his struggle to reproduce as closely as possible the sounds, rhyme, rhythms and meters of Petrarch’s Italian sonnets in his translations:

When the sounds in the Italian text seems to be the dominant element in a particular poem, I am careful to imitate this sound by choosing words that play with and echo each other. I have strived to maintain the same rhythm and meter in English that Petrarch uses in each of his Italian poems. In short, I have tried
In essence, both of these experienced and outstanding translators confirm, at least with regard to poetic translation, that something is ultimately lost: if the rhyme is achieved, perhaps the meter is not exact; or, if the meter is correct, sometimes the meaning is not precisely the same as the original. Thus, when students approach poets like Petrarch via a translation, the loss of one aspect or another of the original can hinder a true appreciation for the unique skills and qualities of the poet in the original. Nevertheless, this problem can also present a unique opportunity to discuss the strategies available to translators and how different translational approaches influence the resultant text. These strategies may include the concepts of ‘foreignisation’, the choice to deliberately leave some words in the original language, thus highlighting a text’s ‘otherness’; ‘formal equivalence’, where the message in the receptor language should closely match the source language; and ‘dynamic equivalence’, where ‘naturalness of expression’ in the receptor language aims to meet the cultural expectations of the reader of the translated text (Munday 2008: 42, 145). However, the question remains, how to bridge in some way the gap that exists between the original poem and its translation for monolingual students in the classroom?

2.1 Presenting multiple translations of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*

As with all poetry studied in my Renaissance literature subject, the poems from Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* are presented in the original vernacular with facing English translations. Initially, I selected Robert Durling’s 1979 prose translations (Petrarca 1979), as they were used by my teaching predecessor. The facing translation gave Italian-language students access to the poems in the original (an original, I might add, far removed from modern standard Italian), while simultaneously allowing the entire class to analyse the themes and imagery, which remained the primary basis for discussion. With additional guidance, I found that even students with no prior knowledge of Italian were able to determine the rhyming scheme when examining the Italian verse; however, much was lost to this latter group of students in terms of appreciation for the fusion of meaning and musicality in the Italian original.

More recently, I brought to class examples of Mark Musa’s 1999 verse translation of the *Canzoniere* (Petrarca 1999). When I asked students to compare the two English translations, I received quite unanticipated feedback, when students expressed a decided preference for the Musa translation. This observation in turn led to lively discussion about the differences they perceived between the two translations, and for the Italian language students, which translation they felt more closely approximated Petrarch’s original, and why. Responses included an appreciation for the sound qualities of the verse translation, and the feeling that Musa had more
closely captured the original Italian, not only in meaning but also with regard to form and rhyme. Viewing two translations of the same poem gave non-Italian speakers access to the original in a way that mirrored the way the Italian language students could compare the fourteenth-century Italian to the English. As seen in Durling’s and Musa’s translations of the first sonnet of the *Canzoniere* collection below, while each translator has attempted to duplicate the appearance of the sonnet’s stanzic structure, with space divisions between the each quatrain and each tercet, respectively, Durling’s verse translation concentrates on meaning over the more rhythmic qualities of Musa’s version:

**Italian**

*Voi ch’ascoltate in rime sparse il suono*  
di quei sospiri ond’io nudriva ‘l core  
in sul mio primo giovenile errore  
in parte altr’uom da quel ch’i’ sono,  
*del vario stile in ch’io piango e ragiono*  
*fra le vane speranze e ’l van dolore*  
*ove sia chi per prova intenda amore,*  
spero trovar pietà, nonché perdono.  
*Ma ben veggio or sì come al popol tutto*  
favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente  
*di me medesmo meco mi vergogno;*  
*e del mio vaneggiar vergogna è ’l frutto,*  
*e ’l pentersi, e ’l conoscere chiaramente*  
*che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno.*

(Petrarca 1999:36)

**Robert Durling translation**

You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of those sighs with which I nourished my heart during my first youthful error, when I was in part another man from what I am now.

For the varied style in which I weep and speak between vain hopes and vain sorrow, where there is anyone who understands love through experiences, I hope to find pity, not only pardon. But now I see well how for a long time I was the talk of the crowd, for which often I am ashamed of myself within;

and of my raving, shame is the fruit, and repentance, and the clear knowledge that whatever pleases in the world is a brief dream.

(Petrarca 1976: 36)

**Mark Musa translation**

O you who hear within these scattered verses  
The sound of sighs with which I fed my heart  
In my first errant youthful days when I  
In part was not the man I am today;  
For all the ways in which I weep and speak  
Between vain hopes, between vain suffering  
In anyone who knows love through its trials,  
In them, may I find pity and forgiveness.  
But now I see how I’ve become the talk  
So long a time of people all around  
(it often makes me feel so full of shame),  
and from my vanities there comes shame’s fruit,  
and my repentance, and the clear awareness  
that worldly joy is just a fleeting dream.

(Petrarca 1999: 36)

After this first, somewhat accidental generator of discussion, each subsequent year that I have taught this subject, I have continued to present students with two translations of Petrarch’s sonnets to stimulate their knowledge of the choices made
in the translation process and to allow students to see that the poems they read are sometimes subject to multiple interpretations, each influenced by the temporal, linguistic and social context of the translator. Correspondingly, multiple translations examined together “can also aid us in getting a better sense of the original work. Even if we can’t read the source language ourselves, we can use translations to triangulate our way toward a better sense of the original than any one version can give us on its own” (Damrosch 2009: 71). Accordingly, students’ understanding of Renaissance poetry is enriched at the linguistic, historical and cultural levels that further enhances their critical engagement with the poetry in way that was difficult, if not impossible, when examining only a single translation.

3. Censorship in Boccaccio: The Tale of Alibech and Rustico (III, 10)

Occasionally, questions about translation have spontaneously arisen in the Renaissance classroom. The second work we read is Giovanni Boccaccio’s Decameron, a collection of 100 stories told by ten youths (seven women, three men) who have taken safe haven in a countryside estate from the ravages of the Black Death in Florence. Each character tells one story each day, according to the theme set by the nominated ‘king’ or ‘queen’, for a total of 100 tales told in ten days. One of the primary points of controversy over the centuries has been the bawdy and erotic nature of the stories recounted in the Decameron, especially since Boccaccio specifically states that he has written the stories, “to provide succour and diversion for the ladies, but only for those who are in love” (Boccaccio 2003 [1972]: 3). Boccaccio also mentions in his prologue to the Decameron that:

In reading them [i.e., these tales], the aforesaid ladies will be able to derive, not only pleasure from the entertaining matters therein set forth, but also some useful advice. For they will learn to recognize what should be avoided and likewise what should be pursued. (Boccaccio 2003 [1972]: 3)

The hiatus between the author’s stated aim for writing the collection of stories—with their seemingly contradictory themes of love, honour, sex (often outside the bonds of marriage), deception and clerical misbehaviour—and the reader’s reception of the text is a longstanding topic of study of the Decameron.²

One of the most overtly sexual tales is the tenth tale told on the third day (III, 10). The story concerns the young girl, Alibech, who, in order to ‘serve God’ becomes a recluse in the company of the hermit monk Rustico. Overcome by lust, he convinces her that she can best serve God by “putting the devil back in hell” (Boccaccio 2003 [1972]: 276), a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Ultimately, poor Rustico is unable to keep up with young Alibech’s fervent desire to serve God, and he is wholeheartedly relieved when she finally departs to be married.

As discussion commenced in class about the explicit sexuality in the story, the theme of clerical corruption and the naiveté of the main female protagonist,
one student mentioned that her edition (not the 2003 Penguin edition ordered for the subject by the university bookshop), in fact had left a large segment of the story untranslated and that it appeared in her edition in the original Italian. This observation led to discussion as to the date of the student’s edition and why the translator might have left the consummation sex scene untranslated for the English reading audience.

The history of the translation into English of Boccaccio’s Decameron has been ably traced most recently by Guyda Armstrong (2013), who has not only identified the 170+ different editions produced in English, but also the cultural context of their translation. In the first full English translation of the Decameron, published in 1620, the Alibech and Rustico story (III, 10), “perhaps the most notorious of all the tales of the Decameron”, and “subject to the most stringent censorship over the years” (Armstrong 2013: 221) does not appear. Instead, the translator replaced the licentious tale of Alibech with one about a female protagonist who epitomises the modest qualities that perhaps were highly valued for women in seventeenth-century England, the story of the “chaste continencie of Serietha Daughter to Siwalde King of Denmarke, being sued unto by many worthy persons, that loved her, would not looke any man in the face, till the time she was married” (Boccaccio 1909 [1620]: table of contents). Later editions remove the Alibech/Rustico tale entirely (Armstrong 2010: 59), until the 1822 edition, when the tale is published in its complete form for the first time in England. However, in this edition and all others produced in English in the nineteenth-century, the text abruptly switches from English to either French or Italian just prior to the scene of Alibech’s sexual initiation3; in fact, this bilingual version remains the norm until the 1972 publication of G.H. McWilliam’s translation, in which Alibech’s tale appears for the first time entirely in English. According to Armstrong (2013: 221), the tale of Alibech is subject to “the most stringent censorship over the years” in the form of replacement, excision, rewriting or by printing the prurient sections in French or Italian. For this reason, Armstrong asserts, “the management of this sexually explicit material can be used as an indicator of intended readerships in the nineteenth century” (Armstrong 2010: 60), where access is granted to a select readership: those of a “high level of education”—particularly men of middle and upper classes with sufficient linguistic knowledge of Italian or French (Armstrong 2013: 255). Thus, “‘decency’ was preserved by the usual expedient of the drawing of the French [or Italian] linguistic veil” (Armstrong 2010: 60).4

Inevitably, almost every semester I teach Literature and Society in Renaissance Europe, I can count on students who have not purchased the recommended edition from the university bookshop to bring to class one of the older translations, or, if using an electronic reader, to have on hand one of the out of print editions that is freely available on the Internet.5 This has meant that the discussion of the text has expanded beyond the analysis of the corrupt practices of members of the clergy or the portrayal of female characters in Boccaccio, to dialogue on the various ways that translators over time have dealt with passages or texts that were perceived to be inappropriate or too vulgar for the general reader, and what this textual
manipulation can potentially tell us about the cultural context of the translator’s English-speaking readership. Thus, through the example of the translation history of one story of the *Decameron*, students can expand beyond their understanding of the fourteenth-century Florentine cultural milieu of the author to critically engage with the complexities of translation and translational choices; the history of the reception of the text by another culture across several centuries; and, ultimately, how translational strategies are influenced by that receiving culture. Lawrence Venuti affirms the benefits of such an approach to translated texts: “Studying translation rather suggests that respect for cultural difference—a pedagogical goal of multiculturalism—can be learned by historicizing various forms of receiving the foreign, including the discursive forms applied in the translation of foreign texts, canonical and marginal.” (Venuti 1996: 333)

4. The ‘caso’ of Lazarillo de Tormes

The third example I will discuss for raising students’ awareness of translated texts concerns the anonymous novella *Lazarillo de Tormes*, first published in Spain at Alcalá de Henares in 1554 and considered the founding text of the picaresque genre. *Lazarillo* is a story about a low-born rogue who relates his life from childhood to the textual present via his experiences with a series of masters who more often than not treat him quite poorly. It is written in the form of a letter addressed to a higher authority, often called ‘Your Honour’ in English, and, depending on the translation one reads, it becomes obvious somewhat early on in the piece that Lazaro, the first-person narrator, has something to hide. His masters, especially the four (out of seven) who are members of the clergy, are shown as being ‘no better than anyone else’, by displaying greedy, stingy, punitive, deceptive and lascivious behaviours. It was likely this highly critical portrayal of members of the Church hierarchy that led to the text being censored by the Inquisition and placed on the *Index Prohibitorum*, the index of prohibited books by the Catholic Church. Widely translated and published throughout Europe, after the first printings in Spain in the mid-sixteenth century, the book was not again printed in its entirety in Spain until the nineteenth century.

In the prologue, Lazaro explains his reasons for writing his life’s story, and why he chooses to write ‘from the beginning’ (i.e., his birth). Lazaro addresses an unidentified social superior, *Vuestra Merced*, known in English as, variously, ‘Your Honour’, ‘Your Worship’ or ‘Your Excellency’. One concise sentence in the prologue may warn the attentive reader that there could something more to Lazaro’s story than a simple desire to amuse by recounting the adventures of his youth. However, depending on how this crucial line is translated, most of the mainstream English versions of this sentence serve to conceal, rather than reveal, the reason Lazaro writes his autobiography. The original Spanish reads as follows: “Y pues Vuestra Merced escribe le escriba y relate el caso muy por extenso” (Anonymous 1995: 89, my emphasis). I would translate this sentence as: “And so Your Honour writes asking me to write and relate the case in great detail.”
This important sentence, easily overlooked, indicates that someone in authority (perhaps a member of the Church hierarchy; possibly the Inquisition) has written to Lazaro requesting him to explain himself and ‘the case’ or ‘affair’. At this point, it remains unclear what said ‘case’ might be; however, there is an implied legal tone to the Spanish word caso. In any event, the reader is soon diverted by Lazaro’s humourous recounting of his youthful adventures, starting with his birth, his boyhood and apprenticeship to his first master, a blind beggarman. As demonstrated by four English translations of Lazaro’s raison d’Écrire, the hint about the legal trouble that Lazaro may be experiencing in the textual present of the prologue is largely overlooked in the English translations:

“Well, your Honour! This author writes what he writes, and relates his story very fully.” (Anonymous 2001 [1908]: 3)

“Your Honour has written to me to ask me to tell him my story in some detail.” (Anonymous 2003 [1969]: 24)

“And as Your Grace writes up that I write to him and may have to give an account of the affair at length…” (Anonymous 1997: 3)

“And therefore, being Your Worship writes me commanding me to record and relate the case very extensively... (Anonymous 2005: 20)

These quotes, in which I have underlined the translation of caso, render caso as variously ‘story’, ‘affair’ and ‘case’. The implication with ‘story’ is that Lazaro has simply been asked to talk about his life or provide a sort of memoir; the English ‘affair’ somewhat maintains the legal tone of caso, but also could refer to a relationship of an amorous nature. Interestingly, ‘case’, while perhaps the most obvious choice for caso, to my knowledge is less frequently found in English translations of Lazarillo. What the reader does not learn until the final chapter of his narrative is that Lazaro, having absorbed the lessons of the (mis-)behaviour of his various masters, seems to have made an arrangement with the local archpriest to marry the latter’s mistress in exchange for a secure living and occasional creature comforts. Lazaro vehemently denies any knowledge of a relationship between his wife and the archpriest, claiming his wife is “as good a woman as any in Toledo” (Anonymous 2003 [1969]: 79)—a sly double-entendre that simultaneously supports and slanders the woman’s good reputation—and he asserts that she is the victim of idle gossip and slander. Only in the final translation (above), where ‘case’ appears for caso would the reader come to understand the legal difficulty implied in the prologue refers to Lazaro’s tacit acceptance of his wife’s adultery with the local priest, a concerning matter for the church authorities.

As a lecturer of Spanish language and literature closely familiar with the Lazarillo text, I was highly aware of the importance of this particular statement at the beginning of the text, and was therefore quite surprised by the variety of translations (and implied interpretations) of this key line in the English editions the first time I taught Lazarillo in English. I therefore felt it was important that I clarify this key
sentence for my students. However, I would also like to make an important point when it comes to teaching translated texts: it is essential to take care when critiquing translations. My responsibility as a teacher is not to compare ‘bad’ translations with ‘good’ ones, but rather to raise student critical awareness about reading translated texts, to bring students to understand that both the original text and its translation(s) are each products of their time, and also to induce students to question the style, content and translational choices made by the translator and the cultural influences that may have influenced those choices. As Lawrence Venuti reminds us:

A pedagogy of translated literature can help students learn to be both self-critical and critical of exclusionary cultural ideologies by drawing attention to the situatedness of texts and interpretations. Translations are always intelligible to, if not intentionally made for, specific cultural constituencies at specific historical moments. (Venuti 1996: 331)

In requiring students to consider the ‘invisibility’ of the translator they’re reading, a new critical engagement is brought to the discussion in the classroom. Questions raised about cultural representation, word choice and even the meaning of words themselves when examining multiple translations or when tracing the translation history of a work of literature all contribute to a fuller discussion about literary interpretation and how to approach different versions of a text.

5. Conclusion

Two of the three examples of teaching translated texts offered here have arisen serendipitously within the classroom, and it is perhaps those unexpected, illuminating moments that provide some of the greatest satisfaction in teaching. However, more experienced language academics have trod these same pathways before, and the discovery of their recommendations for how to choose a translated text and suggestions for teaching with translated texts, have further informed my own pedagogical choices. Both Carol Maier and Isabel Garayta wrote chapters for Literature in Translation: Teaching Issues and Reading Practices. Maier (2010) proposes a criterion for selecting a translation for use in the world literature classroom, while Garayta (2010) suggests ways teachers can help students approach translated texts. Based on their suggestions, which, while having different goals, somewhat overlap, I would like to offer a list of suggestions for teaching translated texts. I recommend, however, that readers consult Maier (2010) and Garayta (2010) first hand, in addition to Lawrence Venuti’s 1996 article, Translation and the Pedagogy of Literature.

Recommendations for teaching translated texts (based on Maier 2010 and Garayta 2010):

1. Make students recognise that they are reading a translation;
2. Contextualize the source text, historically, via the author’s biography and cultural milieu;
3. Study any paratextual matter: the translator’s note, the introduction to the text;
4. Read the text as a literary work;
5. Read the text as a translated work, including any particular difficulties, textual weaknesses and strengths, and the reception of the translation;
6. Use multiple translations of the same text.

Notes
1. Discussions about the role of foreign language programs and the potential need to adapt to a perceived ‘Crisis in Languages’ or as a means of widening outreach to increase language enrolments by teaching world literature subjects have taken place in the UK and the United States in the last decade. For example, see the Report of Working Party on Teaching Literature in Translation by the Association of University Professors and Heads of French at http://www.auphf.ac.uk/minutes.html, which describes this change as “making a virtue out of a necessity”, and the pages of the Association of Departments of Foreign Language (ADFL) Bulletin, in particular volumes 33.1 and 36.3.
2. Even who, exactly, Boccaccio’s intended ‘reader’ or addressee truly is has been debated. For discussion on this topic see Migiel (2003).
3. One of the more humourous elements from a modern perspective are the editorial explanations for the abrupt change in language. For example, in the 1822 Decameron, a footnote explains: “The translators regret that the disuse into which magic has fallen makes it impossible to render the technicals of that mysterious art into tolerable English: they have therefore found it necessary to insert several passages in the original Italian.” (quoted in Armstrong 2013: 244).
4. For a detailed discussion of the excision, inclusion or (non-) translation of the tale of Alibech and Rustico (III,10), see Armstrong (2013), in particular chapter 4. Of particular interest is her discussion of the reception of the Decameron in slightly less than 400 years of translation into English, and the readers and reading communities that various forms of censorship attempt to control.
5. Ironcally, the Brown University website for Decameron Web (http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/DeclIndex.php) makes freely available the J.M. Rigg 1921 edition of the Decameron (first printed 1903) with the offending passages left untranslated in the original Italian.

References