Is *Simpatico* Possible in Translation?  

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Paper Title:  
**Is *Simpatico* Possible in Translation? The 1620 Translation of the Decameron and the Case for Similarity**

Abstract:  
This paper redefines the concept of *simpatico*, introduced and almost immediately undermined by Lawrence Venuti in the sixth chapter of *The Translator’s Invisibility*. An analysis of Venuti’s use of the idea shows that his dismissal of it is largely based on the assumption that it must be defined through sameness and identity. This paper widens the concept of *simpatico* by redefining it in terms of similarity, permitting not only a subjective flexibility to enter into the description of translator-author relationships but also allowing a historicization that in Venuti had to be specifically prohibited in the name of identity. The newly historicized and expanded concept of *simpatico* is then applied to the 1620 translation into English of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.

Keywords: simpatico, similarity, authorship, translation theory, Lawrence Venuti, Giovanni Boccaccio, John Florio, *Decameron*
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Near the end of *The Translator’s Invisibility*, Lawrence Venuti approaches the subject of invisible translation and invisible translators by examining a concept introduced to him by a fellow Italian to English translator: the idea of *simpatico* (2008: chapter 6). *Simpatico* in this context, as defined by Venuti’s translator friend and reported by Venuti, is the bond existing between a writer and contemporary translator that allows the translation to be as transparent as possible. It is a connection that, still according to Venuti’s translator-mentor, should give the translator insight into the meanings and motivations of an author who shares the “same historical moment” (2008: 237), allowing, as Venuti phrases it, “a veritable recapitulation of the creative process by which the original came into existence” by recreating the original author in the person of the translator (2008: 237). And it is a relationship that, according to Venuti’s conclusion on the topic, cannot and does not exist (2008: 264).

As such it may seem strange to base an entire paper on *simpatico*, since Venuti’s argument against it seems detailed and compelling. What I would like to do, however, is discuss the idea of *simpatico* not as an impossible assumption and not, as Venuti has, as a concept that is discredited by the loss of elements in translation and by the impossibility of complete transparency. Instead, I will approach it as a historical relationship that is in fact created through the text by the translator and that, rather than detracting from the comprehension of the original work, is an important part of the afterlife of the original author in the target culture. This conception of *simpatico*, in addition to being more
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useful on its own, fits into a framework of similarity-based translation, an idea I will elaborate briefly before revisiting *simpatico* in more detail.

1. Similarity and Translation Studies

Both Maria Tymoczko (2004) and Andrew Chesterman (1996 and 2004) have begun to explore the possibilities of using similarity as a foundation for thinking about translation studies. Their proposals involve incorporating ideas about how similarity works in cognitive psychology into our understanding of translation; such an incorporation allows a number of assumptions and aspects of translation to be made explicit. The subjectivity of translation “equivalence”, when approached instead with the idea of “similarity”, is made more obvious, since formulations of similarity in psychology rely not upon some measurable and repeatable equality but on the “perception of similarity”—perception that necessarily involves a perceiving subject (Vosniadou and Ortony 1989: 6-7). In addition to the explicit addition of “the translator’s own subjectivity” as “one of the causal factors which affect the form of a translation” (Chesterman 2004: 72), the use of similarity as a foundation for descriptive translation studies can be used to create space for a discussion of both the translation process and the translation product, using Chesterman’s distinction between “convergent” and “divergent” similarity (Chesterman 1996: 161). The first involves two independent entities that the observer is trying to relate to each other using similarity, as is the case with a translation scholar examining a translation and its source text; the second involves similarity between a set of entities derived from one original, that then bear similarity to

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1 This idea of the “perception of similarity” is taken from a discussion of the process of analogical reasoning, a topic related to similarity that I believe could also have significant implications as an analog itself for the process of translation.
that original, describing the process by which the translator produces a translation. In addition, both types of similarity can be used by the translation scholar; Chesterman describes the translation scholar as “looking at the convergent similarity, at a higher, metalevel, between (a) the translator’s created divergent similarity and (b) the scholar’s perceived convergent similarity between the two texts” (Chesterman 2004: 37).

A framework of similarity, however, need not be limited to analyzing the types of textual study that are already dealt with by other translation theories. Combined with the concept of literary systems (see Even-Zohar 1978a, 1978b, 1990), it can be used to discuss all of the factors involved in the creation and situation of a literary text with the system, including systems of authorship, patronage, dissemination, and reception, to name only a few. It is into this framework that I believe a rehabilitated simpatico can be productively and relevantly integrated. In order to understand how simpatico can be reshaped by similarity it is necessary first to revisit Venuti’s definitions and assumptions about simpatico and clarify some points.

2. Defining simpatico

The actual definition of simpatico is a point on which Venuti is deliberately vague. In introducing the concept, Venuti allows the ideas of his translator friend to speak for him; the description of what actually constitutes simpatico is peppered liberally with phrases to distance Venuti himself from simpatico and from its definition: “he explained”, “said my friend”, “my friend believed” (1995: 237). Venuti allows the concept to be defined by the absent friend and only then, operating from assumptions about that definition, moves on to discredit it: “In pursuing my friend’s notion of simpatico, I discovered an Italian writer who forced me to suspect this notion and
ultimately abandon it” (2008: 248). Venuti’s *simpatico*, then is not truly his, or at least he does not wish us to see it so; by not explicitly assigning his own definition of *simpatico*, however, he tacitly allows the friend’s definition to function as his own.\(^2\) Venuti first allows us to assume that he agrees with the definition presented by the friend but ultimately, and more importantly, allows himself the space to present an argument against it that depends on tautological assumptions that are never made explicit.

What, then, is this concept that is relayed to the reader secondhand? *Simpatico* is a condition that a translator and original author may be in when they “live in the same historical moment” and “share a common sensibility” (2008: 237). This bond, Venuti seems to excuse his friend for believing, is “highly desirable in translation because it increases the fidelity of the translated text to the original” (ibid.). Ideally, it creates “an identity” between translator and original author that allows the translator essentially to replace the original author, that renders the translator a transparent agent of translation (ibid.).

When *simpatico* is present, the translation process can be seen as a veritable recapitulation of the creative process by which the original came into existence; and when the translator is assumed to participate vicariously in the author’s thoughts and feelings, the translated text is read as the transparent expression of authorial psychology or meaning. (Venuti 2008: 237-38)

\(^2\) This case is similar to the criticism levelled by Maria Tymoczko that Venuti sometimes refuses to define his terms concretely, especially when he is borrowing them (cf. Tymoczko 2000: 34-40). In the second edition of *The Translator’s Invisibility*, Venuti addresses this criticism, but rather than define his terms, seems to rather problematize the idea of definition *per se* and leave the terms—in this case ‘foreignization’ and ‘domestication’—still largely undefined (see Venuti 2008: 19).
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The equation of *simpatico* with transparency is slipped in here without question, although it is significant here that it is not inherent, but is still “read”. The first connection between *simpatico* and transparency, then, is presented as an unspoken assumption by an external reader. The connection between *simpatico* and transparency is reinforced two paragraphs later when Venuti connects *simpatico* with literary norms: “My friend’s notion of *simpatico* was in fact a development of [prevailing English-language assumptions about poetry] to characterize the practice of translation (it was transparent) and to define the role of the translator (identification with the foreign author’s personality)” (2008: 238-39). *Simpatico* becomes even further enmeshed in transparency later in the chapter as Venuti begins to assume that not only is transparency the result and product of *simpatico* and of the dominant English-language poetics, but that it is the necessary goal of any translator working with *simpatico*:

the notion of *simpatico* actually mystifies what happens in the translation process. Most crucially, it conceals the fact that in order to produce the effect of transparency in a translated text, translators must manipulate what often seems to be a very resistant material. (2008: 248)

Since Venuti allows *simpatico* to be defined as being inextricably linked to transparency, he is able to conclude that since transparency is an impossibility and an illusion, so must be *simpatico*, without questioning this initial assumption or investigating whether the concept could include other types of relationship. The idea of *simpatico* as transparency for Venuti becomes an oppressive and aggressive translation technique: “the notion of *simpatico*, by placing a premium on transparency and demanding a fluent strategy, can be viewed as a cultural narcissism […]” (2008: 264).
The assumption that the translated text produced by *simpatico* must be perceived as identical and transparent to the source text is mirrored in Venuti’s assumptions about the relationship between translator and author. Although *simpatico* is initially presented as “possessing an underlying sympathy”, pointing at a relationship in which the translator and author are similar rather than identical, this meaning is quickly hidden, first by the idea that “there should also be an identity between them” and then the suggestion that the translator’s own personality is effaced through “identification with the foreign author’s personality” (2008: 237, 239). In the end it is this assumption about *simpatico*—that it must remain within the realm of identity and sameness rather than existing also within relationships of similarity and even of perceived similarity—that allows Venuti to dismiss the concept entirely. He discovers a paradox within his own search for *simpatico* with the poet Milo De Angelis: that the very existence of the translator as a being separate from the author precludes the possibility of *simpatico* as sameness. By defining *simpatico* with words like “identity” and “transparency”, Venuti specifically excludes *simpatico* from his conception of the translation process, which he describes at the end of the chapter (2008: 237, 248): “translation is a process that involves looking for similarities between languages and cultures […] but it does this only because it is constantly confronting dissimilarities” (2008: 264).

3. *Simpatico* and similarity

It is precisely from this problematic intersection of similarity, dissimilarity and identity that a slightly wider but more clearly defined idea of *simpatico* can be brought not only to resolve Venuti’s paradox but provide a useful tool for translation analyses within a larger framework of similarity-based descriptive translation studies. Let us
define \textit{simpatico} as a perceived affinity between translator and author—be it personal, emotional, or stylistic—that is created, reinforced, or manipulated by the translator. The perception of similarity is between the translator’s interpretation of the source text, the source-text Author, and the source context of the work, in relation to both the realities of his own literary framework and also in relation to what he sees as the potential of the source. This potential for similarity, I would argue, is latent in the situation of the source and relies on the choices of the translator that may or may not emphasize it in translation; it is in some ways a wider, contextualized version of Walter Benjamin’s “translatability” (Benjamin 1969: 70). A text might have, in its formulation and in its context, certain elements that lend themselves to particular visions of similarity with another literary system, given a translator who perceives that potential. The translator creates or emphasizes \textit{simpatico} by highlighting the potential similarities between himself and the author. Notably absent from this definition are the equation of \textit{simpatico} with any particular style of translation (as opposed to Venuti’s assumption of fluency or transparency) and the requirement that the translator and author be of the same “historical moment” (2008: 237).³

In this conception of \textit{simpatico}, the relationship is not limited by the artificial lower boundary imposed by Venuti in the form of “identity”. Rather, the relationship is opened up to include similarity. This broadening involves the introduction of a new subject position responsible for the interpretation of similarity within the relationship, and it is this subjectivity that allows \textit{simpatico} to function beyond ideas of transparency. Equation, or identity, is not a subjective relationship, since it depends not on an

³ This temporal requirement is reported as part of the translator-mentor’s idea but never explicitly addressed by Venuti.
individual’s perception but on some measurable, repeatable equality between entities. In Venuti’s description of the result of *simpatico* quoted above, it is significant that the entire process is described using the passive voice, with no specified agent: “when the translator is assumed to participate vicariously in the author’s thoughts and feelings, the translated text is read as the transparent expression of authorial psychology or meaning” (2008: 237-38). The anonymous reader, the implicit subject responsible for both the assuming and the reading, is unimportant precisely because transparency and identity are not subjective relationships. By contrast similarity lies partly in objective realities but also very much in subjective ones. Chesterman highlights this subjectivity: “Two entities ‘are’ similar if they are *judged to be* similar—judged by someone” (Chesterman 1996: 159).

The requirement that there be a judge is the starting point for a destabilization of similarity that opens up new interpretive space. Lawrence Barsalou discusses how concepts of similarity vary not only between individuals but for one individual depending on their own recent experiences, and depending on the context in which they consider the objects of comparison (Barsalou 1989). Differences in perception of similarity can therefore be accounted for by a number of variables, without diminishing the perception of similarity by the subjects themselves. Furthermore, Linda Smith identifies different levels of similarity, from relationships of “identity”—the relevant characteristic in Venuti’s dismissal of *simpatico*—to “part-similarity” and “resemblance” (Smith 1989: 150-54). This typology, which differentiates between holistic similarity and dimensional similarity, or the similarity of certain parts, allows the translator-author relationship to develop similarities that depend both on wider understandings of resemblance and also on
more specific perceptions of similarity of particular aspects (Smith 1989: 146-57). The perceived relationships that emerge from these unstable understandings of similarity are then the foundation of simpatico. Rather than deriving from an empirical and repeatable identity, simpatico in its most workable form is based on the subjective, possibly metonymic, context-based experience of similarity. The translator’s perception of similarity is, then, enough to grant the title of simpatico; that other publics might not see the same similarities in no way diminishes their importance to the translator. Simpatico then, rather than being a relationship of identity, is a relationship of what Chesterman terms “convergent similarity” (1996: 161): a similarity drawn between with two separate entities (the translator and the author) between which someone, in this case the translator, sees some relationship.

In such a context, Venuti’s criticism of Dana Gioia’s translations of Montale becomes not a criticism of the idea of simpatico, but of Gioia’s interpretative abilities (2008: 242-44). Venuti writes that “here it becomes clear that the translator’s feeling of simpatico is no more than a projection […]” (2008: 243); the discrepancies that Venuti perceives between Gioia’s translations and the originals invalidate, for Venuti, not only the translations themselves but also the very idea of identity-based simpatico. Venuti’s observations about the translations themselves are no less valid if simpatico is considered to be based on similarity perceived by the translator, but his conclusions about Gioia’s translations no longer eliminate simpatico as a legitimate tool for descriptive translation studies.

This wider view of simpatico allows the translation scholar to examine not only relationships between target and source texts but also between translator and author,
looking for both likenesses and differences, without the burden of sameness, transparency, or historical constraint. It can allow the scholar to find points of contact, moments of being *simpatico*, that are perceived by later audiences and also those that are felt by the translator, whether or not later audiences perceive those same similarities. It is through these points of contact that a descriptive translation study can identify key issues in the translation, key moments in the history of translations of particular works or particular authors, and thereby map out a history of the afterlife of a text and author.

One further expansion is necessary to make *simpatico* workable. Venuti’s analysis of *simpatico* is predicated on the existence of the author and the translator as distinct, unified subjects. The role of the author as such has been called into question by Michel Foucault in his article “What is an author?” (1979), and a functional distinction is made by Mieke Bal in her book *Narratology* between the historical author, who anticipates the text and creates it, and the implied author, who is in turn created through interpretation of an extant text (Bal 1985: 119-20; for the implied author, see also Booth 1961). By incorporating this duality of authorship into the idea of *simpatico*, we can reach a clearer understanding of the relationships between the author and translator. In fact, it is not only the author who is dual, but also the translator. Bal does not discuss translation, but it does not seem too much of a stretch to posit an implied translator, whose relationship to the historical translator is similar to that of the implied author to the historical author. The dual translator, however, does not exist without the dual author, and thus the entire system of authorship in translation becomes fourfold.⁴

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⁴ This is still to some extent a simplification of the case; translation itself is rarely, if ever, a matter of two single texts, two independent languages, and two unconnected people. For the purposes of my argument here, I am beginning with these binaries in order to
Of course, just as a diachronic, bilingual, historicized interpretation of a translated text is not accessible to all publics, it is not necessarily true that any reader will be able to access all four of these figures or to distinguish between them. The theoretical monolingual readers of the translated text who have no access whatsoever to the source text, although they may be aware of the existence of both an author and a translator, have no way of distinguishing between the implied author and the implied translator. The only places that these readers may see the implied translator as separate from the implied author are in any paratextual material that the translator might include, in the form of notes or prefaces. A bilingual reader with access to both the source and target texts will have access to the implied translator not only as the implied author of paratextual material but also as constructed through the differences between the source and target texts. Just as the implied author can be constructed through the source text, the implied translator can be constructed through the spaces between source and target. Furthermore, any reader, whether bilingual or monolingual, may have more or less access to the historical author or translator. At one extreme, the reader may be an expert, perhaps the official biographer of one or the other (or both); at the other, either the source or target text (or again both) may be anonymous, effectively shutting off all possible relationships with the historical figures as individuals.

This is the case with the present case study of these issues pertaining to authorial similarity. The English translation of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* published in 1620, reduce the question to more workable dimensions, but in a less restricted argument, all of the individuals involved in translation, publication, editing, marketing, and other aspects of the translation exchange are present in these relationships, as are all of the texts and languages, multiple and perhaps overlapping, that impinge upon the potentially multiple source and target texts.
although often attributed to John Florio, is in fact anonymous (neither the author nor the translator is mentioned by name in the first edition), and as such, provides an interesting opportunity to search for the implied figures in the absence of the historical ones.\(^5\)

4. The 1620 English *Decameron*

The 1620 translation of the *Decameron* is the first published English translation of the entire work; although a number of earlier translations of individual stories existed, as well as two published complete translations into French, this translation is the first which introduces the *Decameron* in its entirety in English to English-speaking audiences. There are a number of earlier translations of individual *novelle* that are explicitly marked as translations of Boccaccio, but since the 1620 translation is presented without the author’s name, this paper will focus on the ways in which the author and the translator are identities constructed by the text itself, without examining the connections between those identities and other works by Boccaccio, either in translation or in the original.\(^6\) I will begin with an analysis of how the paratextual material of this edition sets up a vision of the similarities that can be perceived between the implied author and the implied translator, before examining how the construction of that relationship is continued through the translations of the *novelle* themselves.

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\(^5\) See Armstrong 2007a on the anonymity of the first edition and the authorial attributions of later editions (especially page 49).

\(^6\) I am not trying to imply that the reading public would be unaware of the authorship of the *Decameron*. Guyda Armstrong points out that the *Decameron* was most likely already being read in England in French and Italian (2007a: 43; 2010). For a history of Boccaccio in England, see Wright 1957 and Armstrong 2010; on early modern reception see Armstrong 2007b.
4.1 Paratext

The project of textual identity creation begins with the paratexts of the 1620 translation. Guyda Armstrong has already done significant research into the implications of certain paratextual elements in the presentation of the 1620 Decameron (2007a), so I will focus my attention on the ways in which the paratext creates images both of the author and the person presenting the author (whom we later discover to be the implied translator), and on how the paratexts align these two figures. The translated text includes three major pieces of paratextual material, which consists of an “Epistle Dedicatory” to Sir Phillip Herbert at the beginning of the first volume (Boccaccio 1620a: A₂⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻), a second dedication, also to Sir Phillip, at the beginning of the second volume (Boccaccio 1620b: A₃⁻⁻⁻), and a letter “To the Reader,” reasonably assumed to be by the printer, immediately following the dedication (Boccaccio 1620b: A⁴⁻⁻⁻; see Armstrong 2007: 52 for the attribution of this letter to the printer). For both the monolingual reader and the bilingual reader, these passages provide a number of cues to the implied translator and also towards interpreting his reading of the source text and thus his own construction of the implied author. The first dedication describes the worth of Boccaccio’s text, including information about what moral lessons readers may take away from reading the translation, and presents a formal apology and request for patronage or support (Boccaccio 1620a: A₂⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻⁻). Guyda Armstrong points out that this “Epistle Dedicatory” is, in fact, part of a tradition of dedicatory letters, and that as such, it is difficult to know what the historical author’s relationship was to the letter and to its dedicatee (Armstrong 2007a: 52). Although I certainly agree that this piece of paratext is not necessarily a personal statement, it does form part of the construction of the implied translator of the
work, and as such, the parallels drawn between the implied translator and Boccaccio are relevant to the topic at hand.

A similar conclusion applies to questions as to whether the “Epistle” was written by the translator (which Armstrong implies is the case). Although it bears no official attribution to the translator, the “Epistle” does conclude with the hope that the dedicatee will be willing to act “in defence of my poore paines” (Boccaccio 1620a: A₂/R). Armstrong (2007a: 52) states that “it is clear […] that the author of the second dedication is the translator himself, and in the absence of any other evidence to the contrary, I have assumed that he (or she) is also the author of the Epistle Dedicatory”. Whether or not the historical translator was actually the author of the “Epistle”, the “Epistle” becomes part of the construction of the implied translator simply by implying that the author of the “Epistle” is the translator.

The “Epistle” identifies two main facets of the Decameron: first, that the stories promote or delineate right behavior and morality, and second, that they are fables, like the fables of Aesop, or “other worthy Writers” (Boccaccio 1620a: A₂/V). In describing the worth of the text, the “Epistle” compares the original author to “witty Æsope; who reciteth not a Fable, but graceth it with a iudicious morall application; as many other worthy Writers haue done the like” (Boccaccio 1620a: A₂/V), before presenting a fable of its own, thus implicitly connecting the implied author of the “Epistle” itself with the implied author of the source text and the tradition of “worthy Writers”. The introduction to the fable explicitly inserts the implied author into this tradition, as an example of writers who use fables: “For instance, let me heere insert one” (Boccaccio 1620a: A₂/V). The “instance” here is not only an instance of a fable, but an instance of an author who
uses fables. The application of this fable is perhaps a bit obscure: a man is accused of
killing another man’s dog, and defends himself before a judge, saying that he acted in
self-defence. The judge says that the man should have hit the dog with the blunt end of
his staff, not the sharp end, to fend it off but not kill it, and the man replies that he would
have, had the dog attacked him blunt end first as well. The interpretation is explicitly left
up to the dedicatee, who is invited to interpret the moral and extend his protection to the
translator and the work, and I will in turn leave it to my own readers.7 The very inclusion
of the fable, however, aligns the implied translator with the author he is translating; the
use of this literary device, particularly after a discussion of its importance in the
Decameron, is a deliberate positioning of the translator in the same realm as the original
author. The implied translator is thus shown to be capable of using fables and employing
their moral applications, and in this capability, similar to the author of the source text.

We are left with an understanding that between the author and translator there
exists some type of simpatico—to use the re-definition of Venuti’s term—as perceived by
the translator who presents the text, that in fact seems to extend past formal similarities in
their writing to moral and intellectual goals for that writing. Here it becomes important
that simpatico be the bond of similarity as perceived by the translator; the basis of this
judgment of simpatico is not whether the modern scholar agrees with the translator’s
assessments of his own position, of the author’s initial position, or of the relationship
between the two. The relationship of simpatico, rather than existing outside of the text, is

7 The logic leading from the fable to the request for patronage and protection is difficult
to reconstruct. The text reads merely, “I know your Honor to be so truly judicious, that
your selfe can make the morall allusion, both in defence of my poore paines, and
acception of the same into your protecction: with most humble submission of my self,
and all my uttermost endeavours, to bee alwayes ready at your seruice” (Boccaccio
1620a: A3)
written into the 1620 Decameron itself, and therefore the translator’s own interpretations of Boccaccio are the only ones relevant to the relationship. This relationship becomes the starting point of scholarly investigation rather than the result of it; the simpatico created through the paratexts can serve as a guide to identifying items of interest within the translated Decameron, and using those points to further understand the relationship itself. This analysis becomes an analysis of convergent similarity. Given the 1620 Decameron and the source texts used, the scholar investigates the similarity that has already been declared to exist by the translator. The difference between this exercise and other forms of descriptive translation studies is that here the similarity under investigation is between the implied author and the implied translator as seen through the texts, rather than between the texts themselves. These points are then the points through which we can most clearly see both the translator’s own perspective and the image of the author that is created.

In such an analysis, as I observed earlier, the bilingual reader with outside knowledge of the text, the author, or the translator, occupies a privileged position. It is important to keep in mind that any exploration of the convergent similarity between the 1620 Decameron and its source texts is an exploration with the means to distinguish between aspects of authorship that are not divisible by a monolingual reader without access to other texts or other interpretations. Thus the adjustments to the image of the author (whom we know to be Boccaccio) and the alignment of that author with the translator are pieces of information that explain the creation of simpatico, but that are invisible without outside information.
4.2 Text: Sources

This adjustment of Boccaccio is accomplished in several ways, beginning with the selection of the version of the source text itself. By 1620 there were in fact a number of versions in Italian as well as two French translations, one by Laurent de Premierfait (1414, first printed in 1485) and another by Antoine le Maçon (first printed in 1558). Written between 1349 and 1351, the text had a relatively rich manuscript tradition, including an autograph manuscript dated to approximately 1370\textsuperscript{8} (Branca 1992: xlv, li; Branca 1976). After the arrival of printing in Italy, the Decameron enjoyed a similarly enthusiastic print tradition, beginning as early as 1470 (see Bacchi della Lega 1967: 31-64 and Branca 1992: lxv). By the mid-sixteenth century, there were some 65 print editions that have been published, according to Vittore Branca’s count (Branca 1992: lxv), but at this point in the text’s history its significance in the tradition of Italian vernacular literature began to be overshadowed by counter-reformation religious concerns.\textsuperscript{9} The book was listed in the Index Librorum Prohibitorum issued by Pope Paul IV in 1559 and was banned as well by the Council of Trent in another Index published in 1563 (Index 1559: Brv, Wright 1953: 129; Richardson 1990: 28 has the Decameron first placed on the Index in 1557). The text was, however, listed in 1564 as one that could be published in the future provided that it was adequately revised (Gargiulo 2009: 1). An expurgated version was published in 1573, followed by a highly manipulated text edited

\textsuperscript{8} This text is unfortunately incomplete, missing three quires. See Branca 1976: xvii-liii for a complete treatment of the autograph manuscript. The authority of the autograph is further complicated by Boccaccio’s habit of multiple revisions.

\textsuperscript{9} See Richardson (1990; 1994) for an account of the editorial and print tradition of the Decameron and its linguistic significance.
by Lionardo Salviati first published in 1582 that was evidently acceptable to the Church (Wright 1953: 129; Richardson 1990).

In his book *The First English Translation of the Decameron*, Herbert Wright has convincingly demonstrated that the translator of the 1620 English edition had access to both an edition of the Salviati version and one of le Maçon’s translation (Wright 1953: 146-88, 264-70), but that the mixture of the two texts is his own. Wright points out that Florio “adopted many features of [Salviati’s] expurgation” while rejecting others, since “as a Protestant he could hardly be expected to follow the Italian editor in removing all passages that displayed the clergy, monks or friars in an unfavourable light. On the contrary, in some cases he intensified Boccaccio’s criticism” (1953: 146).

Salviati’s changes are extensive, and it seems useful to describe at least some of the major categories into which they fall so as to understand the source material available to Florio. Salviati’s edition makes a point in the paratext of emphasizing the moral nature of the works and discussing what in the prefatory material is referred to as the “vera lezione” (Boccaccio 1614: [iii]) of the *Decameron*. Although concerned with morality and religion in order to make the text acceptable to the Inquisition, Salviati’s personal scholarly objective seems to have been philological (Gargiulo 2009; Richardson 1994:

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10 Wright identifies the 1620 translator’s sources as being most likely one of the Venice editions of Salviati’s version, from 1597, 1602 or 1614, and one of the Paris editions of the Le Maçon translation, from either 1578 or 1579. In this paper I refer mainly to the 1602 and 1614 editions of Salviati’s text and the 1578 Paris edition of le Maçon’s translation for textual examples.

11 “True lesson” (all English translations in the footnotes are mine). I will be citing from Salviati’s 1614 edition throughout unless otherwise noted. I have been able to consult the 1602 and 1614 Venice editions of Alessandro Vecchi that Wright believes to be two of the three possible source editions (Wright 1953: 264-5); that he can not choose between suggests that they are substantially the same, and my examination of the 1602 and 1614 editions bears this out. As the 1602 edition’s pagination is erratic at best, I have chosen to refer primarily to the 1614 edition.
Salviati’s edition of the Decameron is presented as a very scholarly text and the first edition includes a lengthy discussion following the dedicatory epistles on the versions consulted and the orthographic conventions used in the editing of the present text (1582: a⁴R—a⁸R). This presentation sets the stage for some of the more textually intrusive changes; in this context for example it seems reasonable that the editor should provide symbols to indicate places where words or sentences are missing in the source texts. In fact there are two such symbols listed: “*” and “…” (1582: a,⁷v), both of which later appear in places in the text where no other edition seems to have had trouble with missing words or corrupted texts. The 1602 and 1614 editions include the orthographic notice but not the list of abbreviations; however they do indicate that certain passages that have been altered appear in non-italic font (1602: ✶⁴R; 1614: a⁶R).

The other frequently used and immediately noticeable textual modification that Salviati makes is in the names and titles of certain characters: almost invariably the priests and monks who are either mocked or condemned by Boccaccio are changed into laymen: teachers, scholars, or ordinary citizens. The few exceptions (such as Frate

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12 For more on Salviati’s edition, see Richardson 1990: 29; Carter 1986; Brown 1974: 160-67; and Brown 1967: 4-7. For more on Salviati’s other linguistic work, see also Serianni and Trifone 1993: 46-49, 179-82, 274-77, and for information on Salviati himself, see Brown 1974.

13 Perhaps the most amusing (although predictable) instance occurs in the tenth novella of the third day (Alibech learns to put the Devil back in Hell), less than three pages long in Salviati’s first edition and almost completely illegible because it contains over 100 of these “missing” pieces of text. It seems that there are so many “missing” pieces on these few pages that the printer of the first edition has actually run out of the first type of asterisk (slightly pointed) that was used on pages 196-97 and has to use a different one (rounded) starting at the bottom of 197 (1582). The 1602 and 1614 editions, although the asterisk is not explained in the introduction, also include the asterisks here.

14 “Thus Antonio d’Oro, Bishop of Florence, who closes an eye to the shady transaction of Diego della Ratta, appears as a layman, and the village priest, who is an accomplice in the theft of Calandrino’s pig, is vaguely referred to as ‘l’amico’. The amorous rector
Cipolla in VIII.10) are accompanied by another of the paratextual additions: marginal notes that indicate to the reader the appropriate moral conclusions to draw (see Richardson 1990: 28-29). The story of Frate Cipolla, for example, is accompanied by a note informing the reader that Boccaccio is not condemning monks at all but rather warning people to be on their guard against those pretending to be churchmen: “si come i veri religiosi son degni d’ogni reverenza, così quelli che fingendosi religiosi vanno ingannando le semplici persone, si deono abborrire” (1614: 349).15 Thus, even in those places where the text is allowed to stand, the reader is guided towards the correct interpretation by the editor.16

Although Salviati’s edition seems to be mostly concerned with avoiding any perception of criticism of the Catholic Church, le Maçon’s translation does not make the same accommodations. Wright describes le Maçon's translation as “scrupulously”

15 “…although true monks are worthy of every trust, and of every reverence, so those, who pretending to be monks go around deceiving simple people, should be abhorred”. The note in the 1602 and 1614 editions is in fact incomplete (1602: S. v; 1614: 349). The complete note reads “L’Autore ne vuol mostrare, che non si vuol così credere a ognuno, e che, sicome i veri religiosi son degni d’ogni fede, e d’ogni reverenza così quelli, che fingendosi religiosi vanno ingannando le semplici persone, si deono aborrare” (“The Author wishes to show from it, that one shouldn’t trust everyone, and that...[etc];1582: 340). The 1602 and 1614 edition notes pick up at “si vuol così credere”, thus the first half seems contradictory but the second half, which I have quoted above, retains its original meaning.

16 For a much more complete treatment of Salviati's modifications, see Wright 1953: Chapter III. He covers changes in how the text treats the themes of love, both physical and spiritual, confession, and morality, among others. See also Brown 1967 and 1974.
following Boccaccio, and suggests that the statements in the introduction that the reader will be able to gain moral understanding from the text cannot have been added by le Maçon himself (Wright 1953: 9). Another paratextual element that Wright suspects may not have been added by the translator is the series of moral rubrics that appear in later editions of le Maçon’s translation. Wright points out that the first two editions of the French translation, supervised by le Maçon himself, did not include these rubrics, and Guyda Armstrong has their source as an Italian edition from 1546 (Wright 1953: 187-88; Armstrong 2007a: 50, n. 53; see also Roaf 1988: 120). Many, but not all, subsequent editions, however, beginning with the 1551 edition printed by Guillaume Rouillé in Lyons, provided them (Wright 1953: 187-88). These rubrics are short statements preceding each novella, instructing the reader on a proper moral conclusion to be drawn from the novella, that is, on what the translator of the 1620 translation terms the “singular morall applications”; the moral rubrics are placed in both le Maçon’s translation and in the 1620 edition after the brief paragraphs that are translations of the summarizing rubrics found in the autograph manuscript copy of the Decameron. The moral rubrics included in the 1620 translation are quite obviously derived from the ones found in the later editions of le Maçon’s translation, but although the English version follows the French quite closely, there are also instances in which it amplifies or expands on the moral lesson presented in the French rubric.

Between Salviati’s heavily edited text and the moralizing influence of one of the later le Maçon editions, then, the 1620 translator is working from an already adjusted vision of Boccaccio (see Armstrong 2007a, esp. 50-51; Wright 1953: 34). Wright believes that the translator was familiar enough with Italian, French, and Italian literature
to be “well aware that in the French version of le Maçon he had a faithful rendering”, and that the translator “also knew that in Salviati’s edition a text was available which by its expurgations furnished a guide to any one wishing to safeguard morality” (Wright 1953: 34). Whether or not the translator was able to determine which version was more accurate, the fact remains that he was aware at least of certain inconsistencies between the texts. Salviati’s Church-approved author and the author presented by the moralizing rubrics of the French, if not the stories themselves, give the translator a source vision of the author that has many more points of simpatico contact with the version presented in the 1620 edition than that of previous, unedited versions or of most modern editions.

The choice of texts may well have been dictated, however, by the practical constraints the availability of certain editions, and thus the choice of particular editions or translations as the source texts for the 1620 translation cannot be the only index of a simpatico vision of the author. That the source texts present a likely version of the author may or may not represent a choice by the translator; the translator’s choices are clearly visible, however, in how he treats the texts, and how he chooses which text to follow in certain key instances. These editorial and translational choices combine with the source text selection to emphasize and reinforce the relationship of simpatico that the translator has perceived.

4.3 Text: Religion

To the moralizing religious elements to be found in Salviati’s edition that rendered it acceptable to the Church and that are amply catalogued and described in Wright, the 1620 translator added his own protestantizing influence. As Wright points out, the translation changes a number of small passages describing, for example, man’s
relationship to God or the reasons for suspending the storytelling on Saturday (Wright 1953: 41-46). This last example provides a good view of some of these changes; in this case Salviati’s edition and le Maçon’s are very similar to each other and the changes are obviously the innovation of the translator.\(^{17}\) In the frame of the Decameron, Neifile, the queen of the Third Day, announces at the end of the Second Day that there will be a pause on Friday and Saturday. Salviati’s edition and the 1620 translation agree that Friday must be honoured since it was the day on which Christ died. They also coincide in saying that Saturday is a day on which, as the 1620 translation has it, “it hath bin a custom observed among women, to bath & wash themselves from such immundicities as the former weekes toile hath imposed on them” (Boccaccio 1620a: 77\(^{R}\)). In both versions, Neifile points out that Saturday is traditionally a day of fasting, although in the Italian the reason given is “a reuerenza della uergine Madre del figliuol di Dio” (Boccaccio 1614: 134),\(^{18}\) while the 1620 translation gives “in honor of the ensuing Sabath” as the reason (Boccaccio 1620a: 77\(^{R}\)).\(^{19}\) The Italian further says that on Saturday, in addition to fasting, one ought to rest from all labour in honour of the coming Sunday: “per honor della

\(^{17}\) Since the texts of both the Salviati 1614 edition and of le Maçon’s translation are much the same here I will refer to Salviati’s text in my analysis and include le Maçon's translation in the footnote. I include a translation of le Maçon only where it diverges from Salviati.

\(^{18}\) “In reverence of the Virgin Mother of the Son of God”. Le Maçon has “pour l’honneur de la vierge Marie & du filz de Dieu” (“for the honor of the virgin Mary and of the son of God”; 1578a: 152\(^{R}\)).

\(^{19}\) Wright’s analysis of this passage is limited to the difference between the Virgin Mary and the idea of the coming Sabbath as the reason for fasting (Wright 1953: 42). Although it is certainly true that Florio’s translation leaves out Mary, it is also true that Boccaccio’s text later mentions the need to honor the coming Sunday; Wright’s analysis also leaves out several other discrepancies.
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soprauegnente Domenica, da ciascuna opera riposarsi” (Boccaccio 1614: 134). By changing the grammatical structure slightly, the English translator manages to put the day of rest on the Sunday: “Beside, it is a day of fasting, in honor of the ensuing Sabath, *whereon* no labor may be done, but the observation of holy exercises” (Boccaccio 1620a: 77\(^8\), my italics). The Brigata approves of Neifile’s plan, and Salviati’s *Seconda Giornata* ends saying that each of the characters “con disiderio aspettarono la domenica” (Boccaccio 1614: 135). The “company” of the English translation ends the Second Day on a much more sombre note, “spending the Sunday in solemne devotion” (Boccaccio 1620a: 78\(^8\)), a reading that seems to owe something to le Maçon’s “ilz attendirent le dimenche en grande deuotion” (Boccaccio 1578a: 153\(^8\)) but that, even in that case, requires a modification of the verb. As Wright points out, the continual emphasis on Sunday as opposed to Saturday may be partly motivated by a desire to suppress the Marian focus of the original (Wright 1953: 42-3). Such minor changes with major doctrinal implications could perhaps even be seen as assisting an already anti-clerical author further along the road towards Protestantism; the translation here essentially corrects religious doctrine in order to make the religious sentiment of the characters and by implication of the author more acceptable and similar to that of the translator, presumably himself a Protestant.

A more actively anti-Catholic change occurs in the first story of the third day, in which Masetto, a handsome young man, pretends to be mute in order to gain a job as a gardener at a convent. His ruse proves effective as the nuns, a few at a time, discover that

\(^{20}\) “In honor of the coming Sunday to refrain from all work”. Le Maçon has “pour cause du dimanche ensuuyant” (1578a: 152\(^8\)).

\(^{21}\) “Awaited Sunday with desire”.

\(^{22}\) “They awaited Sunday in great devotion”.

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he is willing to make love to them, even though he pretends to be a fool. Finally, one day while sleeping with the Abbess, he ends his deception to exclaim that it is impossible for him to continue to satisfy so many women without a break. His newfound ability to speak is declared a miracle, and he continues on at the convent for many more years, after being made steward so that his duties would not be too demanding. As Wright observes (1953: 131, 161-62), Salviati’s edition makes only one major change to the story, setting it “appresso ad Alessandria” (1614: 140) and making it into a type of harem of the Sultan of Babylon rather than a convent “en cestuy nostre pays”, as le Maçon has it (1578a: 157R).23 The plot itself, however, remains unchanged. The 1620 translator follows Salviati in allowing the story to be set in Alexandria but refuses to accept its removal from the religious sphere. Salviati’s edition tells us that in this location, “molte pulzelle [l’Ammiraglio] soleua tener racchiuse” (1614: 140),24 and the English changes only one word of this: “divers virgins were kept as recluses or Nunnes” (1620: 79V).25 As Wright again observes (1953: 162), throughout the text Salviati refers to the women using words like “donna”, “giovane”, and “compagna” (1614: 141-2).26 The 1620 translation instead follows le Maçon and persistently calls them the “Abbesse”, “Nunnes”, and “Sister” (1620a: 80V, 81R).27 Although he does refer once more to the Sultan, the English translator also finds room to add an entire paragraph to the discussion between two of the

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23 “Near Alexandria” rather than “in this country of ours”.
24 “[The Admiral] used to keep many young women in seclusion”. This setting perhaps owes something to an episode in another work by Boccaccio, the Filocolo, in which a young woman is taken prisoner and sold to the admiral of the Sultan of Alexandria.
25 Since le Maçon does not set the story in Alexandria, he does not need to describe the young women as being “kept” anywhere, and can merely refer to “un Monastere de femmes” (1578a: 157R).
26 “Woman”, “young women”, and “female companion”.
27 Le Maçon refers to the women as “Abbesse”, “Nonnains”, and “Religieuses” (1578a: 157R, 157R, 159R e.g.).
women about whether they should approach Masetto. In this added paragraph, the women’s excuses are framed in a religious discourse. One of the women says that she heard of a woman who fell in frailty, with a man that was both lame and blinde, and discovering the same to her Ghostly Father in confession, he absolved her of that sinne, affirming that she had not transgressed with a man, because he wanted his rationall and understanding parts. (1620a: 81R)

She further justifies her plan by referring to a common Italian proverb as being part of their religious framework: “beside, the Lawes and constitutions of our Religion doth teach us, that a sinne so assuredly concealed, is more than half absolved” (1620a: 81R-81V).28 Her companion, rather than object, as she does in Salviati, that their virginity is “promessa al Soldano” (1614: 142),29 says tellingly, as she does in le Maçon’s translation, that “we have promised our virginity to God” (1620a: 81V).30

Their decision made, Salviati’s young women lead Masetto into an arbour and enjoy themselves with him without significant divergences from the standard text except their lack of a religious calling, but the nuns of the 1620 text descend even deeper into Catholic depravity. Omitted is some of the more sexually explicit wording (“ciascuna provar volle, se il mutolo sapeva cavalcare” for example; 1614: 14331), with the following substituted for Boccaccio’s description of what happened once they reached the arbour:

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28 The proverb in Italian is “Peccato celato è mezzo perdonato” (“A sin that is hidden is half forgiven”).
29 “Promised to the Sultan”.
30 Le Maçon’s text reads: “nous auons promis nostre virginité à Dieu” (1578a: 159V)
31 “Each one wanted to find out how well the mute could ride”. Le Maçon has “chacune d’elles voulut esprouuer plus d’vne fois comme le muet sçauoit aller à cheual” (1578a: 160V).
...I leave it to the Nunnes owne approbation, whether Massetto was a man rationall, or no. Ill deedes require longer time to contrive, then act, and both the Nunnes, having beene with Massetto at this new forme of confession, where enjoyned (by him) an easie and silent penance, as brought them the oftner to shrift, and made him to proove a perfect Confessour. (1620a: 81\textsuperscript{V})

Not only does the translator not enlighten the reader as to what exactly happens in the arbour, he connects it explicitly back to the added paragraph which connects illicit sexual activity to the Catholic sacrament of confession, damning at one stroke both the “nunnes” and the Catholic Church itself.\textsuperscript{32}

The translation of this novella goes beyond the desire to correct doctrinal errors that may have motivated the set of changes to the end of the Second Day and, by explicitating some of the moral and religious conclusions that might be drawn from the source text story in le Maçon’s translation imputes to the source author views that justify the claim of morality made for the author in the “Epistle Dedicatory”.\textsuperscript{33} In this translation, the “morall application” (Boccaccio 1620a: A\textsuperscript{2}V) applied to the fable indeed moves the author away from the moral relativism of other interpretations of Boccaccio, firmly

\textsuperscript{32} For other discussions of the project of the protestantizing of the translated text, see Wright 1953: 41-46, 148-64. I have here presented two cases of changes made in the English text as an example; Wright goes into much more detail than is possible here about specific changes throughout the Decameron.

\textsuperscript{33} It is worth noting here as well that the distinction one can make between what Boccaccio wrote (as represented by Le Maçon or even Salviati) and what the translator added is one that can be made only by the bilingual reader with access to all texts. For the monolingual reader, or the reader with access only to the translation, the additions of the translator are not perceived as additions but as authentic passages undifferentiable from the other parts of the novella.
establishing him as a writer worthy of the attentions of a translator concerned with the moral use of fables.

The religious project of the 1620 translator, thus, is not limited to textual modifications or to specifically religious or Catholic issues, and in fact begins in his “Epistle Dedicatory”, when he outlines the role which he perceives for the Decameron, of exposing vice and leading the reader to a greater understanding of virtue. The implied translator points out that many of the individual novelle have been translated and published previously, but without the author’s “singular morall applications” (Boccaccio 1620a: A²⁵). He attributes to Boccaccio a single-mindedly moral goal for the Decameron, one which is perhaps not entirely borne out by all of the novelle themselves. The readers are told exactly what the author’s intent was in writing the Decameron: “[I]t was his full scope and ayme, by discovering all vices in their ugly deformities, to make their mortall enemies (the sacred Vertues) to shine the clearer [...]” (Boccaccio 1620a: A²⁵). The translator provides further cover for the author in his translation of the “Proemio”, in which he not only adds that there are “judicious moralles belonging to them”—belonging, that is, to the hundred “Novelles, Tales, Fables, or Histories” mentioned in the original version—but ends the section with an additional declaration of moral fervour (1620: a⁵). Salviati’s version and le Maçon’s translation agree here and declare that from the reading of these tales, the audience will gain both pleasure and benefit, “inquanto potranno conoscere quello, che sia da fuggire, e che sia similmente da seguitare” (1614: [xxvii]). The 1620 translation allows the author, through his translation, to go one step

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34 “Inasmuch as they will be able to learn that which is to be avoided, and similarly that which is to be imitated”. Le Maçon’s translation reads, “d’autant qu’elles pourront connoistre ce qui est à euiter, & ce qui est à ensuyure” (1578a: a⁸).
further: “because in them you shal perceive, both the sin to be shunned, and the vertue to be embraced; *which as I wholly hate the one, so I do (and ever will) honor the others advancement*” (1620a: a5; my italics).

The translator has thus provided an answer to both accusations of immorality and a way that he can present these often immoral tales in a moralizing way: where the text presents illicit behaviour the author is showing the reader “the sin to be shunned”. This does not mean, however, that the translator is prepared to leave in his translation the “sin” in all of its vulgar glory. The changes that he makes in Masetto’s story to the description of sexual activities are typical of his tendency to clean up even the descriptions of sinful behaviour.

4.4 Text: Sex

In the second story of the seventh day, Peronella is entertaining her lover when the husband comes home unexpectedly. Peronella tells the husband that the man is there to buy a large barrel that they have had in the house for a long time, but that the barrel is dirty. The husband climbs into it to clean it out, and Peronella and the lover finish their activities with Peronella leaning across the opening of the barrel to point out to her husband spots that he has missed. In both the Salviati and le Maçon, their activity is compared to the wild horses of Parthia mounting the mares.35 Although the 1620 translator does translate the earlier statement that the lovers, since they could not continue

35 “...in quella guisa, che negli campi gli sfrenati caualli, e d’amor caldi, le caualle di Partia, assaliscono, ad effetto recò il giovinil desiderio” (1614: 368) (“In that manner, in which in the fields the wild horses, enflamed by love, mount the mares of Parthia, the youthful desire was brought to a conclusion”). Le Maçon has “en la maniere que les cheueaux sauauages eschauffez en amours saillent par les grandes campagnes les iuments de Parthe” (1578b: 3938).
as they wished, continued as they were able to, he omits this more vivid description. The 1620 English Peronella leans into the barrel to give advice, her husband warns her not to injure herself leaning against the edge of the barrel and tells her that she should “leave the cleansing of it to me” (1620b: 27\textsuperscript{v}). The translation then suddenly leaves the trio where they are, and informs the reader that “To be brief, the Brewing Fat was neatly cleansed, Peronella and Strignario both well pleased, the money paid, and honest meaning Lazaro not discontented” (1620b: 27\textsuperscript{v}). This is the end of this version; the climax of the story, in which the cleaning of the barrel and the lovers’ amorous activities end at exactly the same moment, is certainly left out, as is the husband’s emergence from the barrel, almost comic in light of the preceding events, and the lover’s subsequent departure with his newly-cleaned and newly-acquired barrel. Similarly, in the story of Spinelloccio and Zeppa on the eighth day (VIII.8), a seemingly restrained description of intercourse is removed and replaced with the rather prurient “now, what they did else beside... I leave to your imagination, as rather deserving silence, then immodest blabbing” (1620b: 88\textsuperscript{v}).\footnote{Wright documents a number of other, similar omissions; deletions of various lengths that hide potentially offensive behavior and descriptions (Wright 1953: 52).}

These small silences in moments that might be considered particularly vulgar or offensive are relatively small-scale cases of “zero translation,” or omission in translation. Perhaps the largest instance of zero translation or modification to avoid sexually immoral material occurs in the tenth story of the third day.\footnote{Another large instance of zero-translation is the replacement of the sixth story of the sixth day, which Wright suggests was merely uninteresting to the translator (Wright 1953: 52).}

36 Salviati’s edition reads “quanto li piacque, con lei si solazò, e ella con lui” (1614: 458) (“As much as he liked, he entertained himself with her, and she with him”). Le Maçon reads “autant qu’il luy pleut passa le temps auec elle, & elle auec luy” (1578b: 491\textsuperscript{v}).

37 Although Salviati’s edition is so
mangled as to be unreadable (see note 13), le Maçon’s translation has the story in its entirety, so the translator certainly had at his disposal at least one comprehensible version of the original from which to work. The 1620 translation instead replaces the story of Alibech and the hermit Rustico with a story about Serictha, the daughter of the King of Denmark, that Wright identifies as being taken from the *Histoires tragiques* of French translator and author François de Belleforest (Wright 1953: 52). The translator recognizes that such a tale might seem out of character for the usually bawdy and irreverent Dioneus to tell, and so even has him excuse himself before beginning: “Gracious Ladies, I know that you do now expect from me, some such queint Tale, as shall be suitable to my merry disposition, rather favouring of wantonnesse, then any discreet and sober wisedom […]” (1620a: 112). Dioneus goes on to say that he was so impressed, however, by the gravity and worthiness of the previous tales that he has decided to present this tale instead. Where the story of Masetto incorporates explicit anti-Catholic rhetoric into the tale and thus reduces the possibility of the reader noticing any discrepancy, the explicit acknowledgment of discrepancy by Dioneus allows the tale itself to function normally within the text and not seem out of place.

As a translational strategy, it is extreme to say the least, but not out of keeping with the other translational choices in the 1620 edition; this tale in the original is brief and as far as the translator’s purposes are concerned, contains only objectionable material that would be difficult if not impossible to moralize. The silent elision of small instances of sexual material, and the camouflaged deletion of an entire story may well stem from the same source as the explicitation of Masetto’s moral: the translator’s desire to make

1953: 32). Armstrong suggests that the story may have been seen as blasphemous and removed on those grounds (Armstrong 2007a: 46).
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absolutely clear the moral statements he perceives as being present or possible in the author’s text. By eliminating passages that might distract the reader from the moral, or that might make the sin seem more attractive than repulsive, the translator continues to draw attention to the virtues to be embraced and the sins to be shunned, still allowing both his own figure and that of the source author to be subsumed in a moralizing *simpatico*.

Another major example of zero translation in the 1620 *Decameron* is the Author’s Conclusion. Salviati’s edition has it with minor changes, for the most part substitutions of classical figures for religious ones, and it is included as well in le Maçon’s translation (1614: 596-99; 1578b: 366\(^V\)-370\(^V\)). The Conclusion is a defence of the work, drawing in part on a philosophy of life that seems almost relativistic at times. Boccaccio goes so far as to state that no object or concept is in itself good or bad, and that it is to the use of such objects or concepts in particular situations that such judgements can be applied.\(^{40}\) Wright takes the absence of the “Conclusion” to indicate that the translator was in fact “not blind to the discrepancy” between his aims and Boccaccio’s, judging that he left it out because its philosophy so clearly contradicted his own (Wright 1953: 53).\(^{41}\)

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\(^{38}\) These pages are misnumbered as 601, 501, 602, 603. They are folios Pp4\(^V\)-Pp6\(^R\).

\(^{39}\) Folio 370 of le Maçon’s translation is misnumbered “670”.

\(^{40}\) “Quasi ciascuna cosa in se medesima è buona ad alcuna cosa, e male adoperata puo essere nocive di molte” (“Almost every thing in itself is good for something, and misused can be damaging to many”; 1614: 597). This page is misnumbered as 501. Le Maçon has “Chacune chose en soy-mesmes est bonne à quelque chose, & quand elle est mal adaptée, elle peut estre nuisante en plusieurs” (1578b: 368\(^R\)).

\(^{41}\) This passage in Wright, while worthwhile, is slightly diminished by his citing “the omission of the ‘Proemio’ and ‘Conclusion’” as his proof; the “Conclusion” is certainly missing but the “Proemio” is just as certainly present (Wright 1953: 53). The “Proemio” does, however, disappear from later editions of the translation (Armstrong 2007a: 45).
Although the omission of the “Conclusion” and the many changes that the translator has to make within the text certainly suggest that he was conscious of discrepancies between his source text and the goals of his translation, this does not mean that he necessarily perceived there to be a “great gulf” between himself and Boccaccio as writers (Wright 1953: 52). It could certainly be argued that the translator’s insistence on his author’s morality and thence on the connection between the two of them is merely a literary device to make his translation acceptable to a contemporary audience, but it is also productive to see, as this analysis does, how the translator’s claim of sympathy—of simpatico—with Boccaccio reconstructs the author and reinforces itself.

In the end the image of the author that emerges from the translation has many points of contact with his seventeenth-century translator. His social and moral concerns reflect the seventeenth century as much as, if not more than, they do the fourteenth, and the goal of the work has been assimilated into the goal of the translation. In addition to changing specific parts of the stories themselves to make their moral purposes clearer, the translator claims this to be in line with the author’s original intent, which he describes both in his own introduction and in the additions he makes to the “Proemio”. The translation presents an interpretation of an author that is not so much moralized, as Wright has it, as moral (see particularly Wright 1953: 46-60). The translator is not claiming to have changed the Decameron or the author in order to make them acceptable; he is rather claiming that they already were as he presents them.

5. Conclusion

This, then, is the legacy of simpatico based on similarity. Rather than being mired in issues of interpretation and representation made fundamental by the requirement of
identity, this type of *simpatico* encourages the translation scholar to investigate the translator’s perceptions of similarity for what they can tell us about literature, for the pointers they can give when we consider what aspects of a translation are important or worth examining, for the history that they can reveal. An examination of the bond of *simpatico* becomes an examination of the process by which it was created and perceived by the translator, an act that at least in this case is concurrent and overlapping with the act of translation itself.

Rather than highlighting the problems of translation as it is or was, *simpatico* is a window into understanding the process of translation and the importance of historical and individual perspective in translation studies. And if we take the concept one step further, after the establishment of this bond by the translator, after the publication of the translation, we can see that an analysis of the various bonds of *simpatico* that have been manufactured by the translators of a single work through the centuries can be, in itself, a history of the afterlife of the text. Chesterman writes that “translation is […] not equative but additive […] in that it brings added value” when speaking about the divergent similarity relation between source text and multiple target texts (Chesterman 1996: 163).42 Each new version, each divergently similar text brings something new to the entire textual relationship. We can say the same of the author: through the multiple created similarity relationships with various translators and their translations, the character of the writer is also additive. Each relationship as it is created is convergent: the

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42 Raul Mordenti expresses a similar sentiment when discussing rewritings based on censorship, which “ha in realtà non solo coperto e rimosso un testo integro, ma anche determinato, costruito, prodotto un diverso testo e un nuovo senso” (1982: 253). (“Censorship has, in reality not only obscured and diminished an integral text, but also caused, constructed, and produced a different text and a new meaning.”)
linking of two separate entities through similarity, but seen from a distance, one can perceive a divergent pattern of relationships, each of which leads back to the original author, and all of which thus implicate that original.

The *simpatico* created by the translator of the 1620 *Decameron* links a vision of the author with the implied character of the translator, adjusting the text to reflect the re-created persona of the author and using the paratext to indicate the connections between author and translator. *Simpatico* allows the changes made to the text and the method of treating the work to be assimilated into a coherent vision rather than kept isolated as individual quirks of the translator; they provide a structure for analyzing such changes systematically and examining how the changes affect the perception of both the translator and the author. Even dealing with the 1620 *Decameron* as an anonymous work rendered in English by an anonymous translator, *simpatico* allows a picture to be created of the layers of interpretation and authorial creation involved. From the perspective of a reader who is already familiar with Boccaccio and knows him to be the author of the *Decameron*, the changes that form the pattern of *simpatico* point to both characteristics of the source text and author and of the target text and translator. Rather than detracting from the author, *simpatico* has added a dimension to Boccaccio. Whether we accept this version of him depends entirely on the nature of the *simpatico* that we are able to establish with him ourselves.
Is *Simpatico* Possible in Translation?

Anna Strowe

References

Primary


------ (1620a) *The Decameron, containing an hundred pleasant nouvel*, London: printed by Isaac Iaggard.

------ (1620b) *The Decameron, containing an hundred pleasant nouvel: the last Four Dayes*, London: printed by Isaac Iaggard.

Secondary


*Index auctorum et librorum* (1559), Rome: Antonium Bladum.


