‘No Tincture of Learning?’: Aphra Behn as (Re)Writer and Translator

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Abstract
Aphra Behn (1640-89) was one of the foremost female writers and translators in Europe of her time. Best known as the author of the short novel *Oroonoko* (1688), she was also an energetic translator and produced English renderings of classical and contemporary authors, not least Bernard de Fontenelle’s work on astronomy, the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), which appeared as *A Discovery of New Worlds* two years later. In this lecture I shall be exploring how Behn styled herself as a female translator of early scientific writing, before comparing her with British women working in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who similarly contributed to the ‘feminisation’ of science and the circulation of scientific knowledge to a wider readership through their translation activities.

Introduction

As Virginia Woolf famously wrote in *A Room of One’s Own*, ‘All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds’ (Woolf [1929] 2001: 56). In a lecture on women speaking their minds – whether as authors, translators or critical readers – Aphra Behn seems to offer the perfect starting point. Her creative literary practice extended not only to the writing of numerous plays and poems, but also to translations of Latin poetry, French travel writing and a book of epigrams, as well as to scientific work on botany and astronomy. And so I hope that the discussion which develops today bridges the gap between Gesine Manuwald’s lecture from earlier this month on neo-Latin as a language of translation in Elizabethan England and Carol O’Sullivan’s lecture in a fortnight’s time on the spirited but ruthless nineteenth-century publisher Henry Bohn, who was also greatly supportive of women’s involvement in translation, not least in science.

Aphra Behn was probably born in 1640, just before the outbreak of the English Civil War (1642-51), and died in 1689. She was one of the first female authors to have earned her living by her pen and one of the earliest and most prodigious professional woman translators. She offers us interesting insights into the kinds of genre that female authors in the Restoration were tackling. Her works articulate reflections on a variety of different topics, including the relationship between translation and language, translation and

nation, and translation and gender. Brought up near Canterbury among French-speaking Huguenot refugees and Dutch émigrés, she later became an astonishing example for her day of a woman of the world: she worked as an English spy in Flanders and the Netherlands during the Anglo-Dutch wars (1652-74), visited colonial Surinam in the early 1660s, possibly also saw Virginia, and journeyed through France and Italy, at some point in the forty-nine or so years of her life. Her trip to take up residence in the West Indies – a voyage during which her father died – was to have lasting effects on her work. Her most famous novel *Oroonoko* (1688) draws heavily on her experiences there and the friendship she cultivated with a prince from one of the indigenous peoples. As a figure who moved with apparent ease between the Old World and the New, Behn had communicated with and mediated between Europeans, Africans and Amerindians in a series of multilingual and intercultural encounters which would have confronted her directly with a number of different aspects pertaining to issues of identity. Firstly, she travelled as a Briton within the context of European imperialism. Secondly she was a woman caught up in the decidedly masculine pursuits of colonial domination and economic exploitation. Thirdly, she was a female translator in the predominantly male world of classical translation and scientific knowledge generation and transmission.

As Janet Todd stresses in her magisterial study, Behn remains a multifaceted figure – a spy, a dramatist, a political propagandist, a commentator on colonialism and race – each of which demanded the playing of different roles (1996, 2). And the adoption of different poses is something well reflected in the sheer variety of the texts she selected for translation. Behn's translations are clustered towards the end of her working life. This is possibly out of financial need or because translation could allow her to partake of controversies about science, religion and philosophy which did not belong to her intellectual domain as an 'unlearned' female. Either way, her translations reflect her continued interest in a range of different genres: tales of adventure and romance, commentaries on social mores and misconduct, and more elementary, 'popular' discussions on science. Her career began with Latin poetry -- Ovid's *Heroides* V "Oenone to Paris" – but it was with the Abbé Paul Tallemant's *Le voyage de l'Isle d'Amour* (1663) that she really made her mark as a translator. *A Voyage to the Island of Love*, which appeared in 1684, is an

account of the unhappy lover Tircis' voyage to the country of Content that is interrupted when he goes ashore to the enticing Isle of Love. A year later, Behn was working on La Rochefoucauld's collection of epigrammatic maxims the *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales* (1675), translated as the *Reflections on Morality, or Seneca Unmasqued* (1685), in which he sought to demystify idealised notions of morality and to uncover the driving motifs of self-love and self-interest which influenced people's actions. In 1686 she turned to Balthazar de Bonnecourse's prose narrative *La montre* (1686) which appeared as *The Lover's Watch*. The year 1688 was a busy one for Behn, in which three translations appeared. The first of these was Tallemant's *Le second voyage de l'Isle d'Amour* (1664), which she entitled *Lycidus* after the different name she gave to the narrator. The second was Bernard de Fontenelle's *L'histoire des oracles* (1687), in English *The History of Oracles*. This was an adaptation by Fontenelle of a controversial Dutch work published in Latin by Van Dale, an account of oracles in classical antiquity. The third was Bernard de Fontenelle's astronomical text, the *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686), translated as *A Discovery of New Worlds* (1688), which was prefaced by an 'Essay on Translated Prose', on which I want to focus particular attention later. This was followed book six of Abraham Cowley's botanical work *De Plantis* in 1689.

For Behn, translation was always a creative undertaking involving the expansion and amplification of originals, the public and prominent display of her name on the title-page, sometimes even without the name of the original author, to gain credit for her own work. But translation, and particularly the translation of scientific writing, also enabled her to reflect on modes of female enquiry and to motivate female readers to be more greatly aware of the knowledge exchanges taking place around them. Or as Behn put it herself in a line added to her translation of Fontenelle's *Entretiens*, 'To encourage the fair Sex (who lose so much time at their Toylets in a less charming Study) by an Example of a Lady who had no supernatural Characters, […] who has no Tincture of Learning' (Behn, *Works* IV, 88). Early modern theories of translation were often articulated in connection with allusions to paternity, sexuality and gender. As Lori Chamberlain reminds us, the sexualisation of translation appears most frequently in the

tag '*les belles infidèles*' coined in the seventeenth century – the notion that like women, translations can either be beautiful or faithful but not both.

Much scholarship has been devoted to Behn's translations of fictional works to assess her translation strategies and modes of self-presentation. But what I find most intriguing is her scientific translation work – precisely because, from the perspective of gender in translation, it was in her English rendering of Fontenelle that she was most obviously testing the boundaries between male and female domains of knowledge. (This was much less the case for, say, her translation of Tallemant's allegory of male seduction on an island far removed from Europe, which echoed Madeleine de Scudéry's *Carte du Pays de Tendre*, published together with the first volume of her romance *Clélie* in 1654 – see Brinks 1993). Scholars in translation studies have long dallied over the role women have performed as translators of *fiction* – principally poetry and prose fiction – working on the premise that these genres were perceived as most 'acceptable' and therefore most empowering for women. But the (often troubled) inclusion of women into aspects of *scientific* life in Britain – from the first so-called 'Scientific Revolution' in the seventeenth century to the present day – makes their role as translators of scientific writing doubly intriguing.

I want to start by looking at how Behn styled herself as a female writer and translator – and indeed what she understood by 'translation' in the period in which she was working and I shall be focusing in particular on her 'Essay on Translated Prose' here. In a second section, I move on to consider her specifically as a translator of scientific writing within the cultural context of the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century. Here I'll be thinking about how the prevailing social and cultural conditions determined the ways in which women could be involved in scientific learning and how they could present themselves as consumers but also producers of scientific knowledge. Finally, I want to consider her as an important early example of British women's engagement with science through translation and to chart briefly the course that women's scientific translation took in the couple of centuries following.

1. Aphra Behn as a (Re)Writer and Translator

Behn was writing in an age in which translation was still seen as a prestigious activity, rather than one that merely produced derivative texts, lesser cousins and poorer copies of the original. Vernacular translations of contemporary works played an important role in emphasising national differences and in beginning to shape a canon of work in one particular language. Translation did not equate with 'servile' fidelity to the source text: quite the opposite, it prompted translators to play creatively with language in ways which conveyed the sense and style more than each and every word. Drawing on the language of science in his preface to *The Destruction of Troy* (1656) from the second book of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Sir John Denham observed:

> it is not [the translator's] business alone to translate Language into Language, but Poesie into Poesie; & Poesie is of so subtile a spirit that in pouring out of one Language into another, it will all evaporate; and if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *Caput mortuum* [dead head]… (Denham 1656: Preface, unpaginated)

Denham therefore first likens the translation to the transfer of subject matter from one vessel to another, in the process of which the 'spirit' is lost through evaporation. He then refers to processes of transfusion (possibly a contemporary scientific reference to William Harvey's 1628 work on the circulation of the blood) into a body, Denham clearly favoured creativity in translation and endorsed the translator's right to use the source text as a springboard in his or her own poetic undertakings. Abraham Cowley, writing the same year in the preface to his *Pindaric Odes* noted:

> If a man should undertake to translate *Pindar* word for word, it would be thought that one *Mad man* had translated *another*; […] I have in these two *Odes* of *Pindar* taken, left out and added what I please; nor make it so much my aim to let the Reader know precisely what he spoke, as what was his *way* of *manner* and speaking; (Cowley [1656] 1672: Preface, unpaginated)

So for Cowley the sense of the original was an important element that needed to be conveyed, less so the exact content. As Elizabeth Spearing has pointed out, considering how Behn went about tackling the task of translation is only of limited usefulness, given that she was generally working with texts very different

from those considered by the theorists we have just discussed (Spearing 1996: 156). It is important to realise, though, that translation as a creative enterprise would have opened up Behn's world in a number of different ways. It would have enabled her to make very close readings of works she might otherwise not have encountered and it gave her 'the possibility of escape from the strongly and perhaps stiflingly Christian framework of the vernacular writings most readily available to her' (Spearing 1996: 154). Most obviously, it would have kept her *au courant* with ideas circulating on the Continent.

In her authoritative account of Behn's translation work, Line Cottegnies has analysed the various strategies of translation she used, ranging across Dryden's categories of metaphrase, paraphrase and imitation. She has demonstrated that in Behn's translation of La Rochefoucauld's *Réflexions* 43% of the maxims corresponded to a faithful translation of the original, 16.5% were paraphrases, so maxims freely interpreted or rephrased, but still close to the original, and 40.5% were free adaptations, some of which even seemed to be in direct contradiction to what had actually stood in the original (Cottegnies 2000: 14). Behn was therefore clearly not averse to using 'free translation' as a way of conveying her own ideas, to some degree hidden behind the 'mask' of La Rochefoucauld's authorship. Behn certainly deploys a variety of different strategies in her translations which feminise the writing voice in significant ways. But it would be equally important to stress that some of her translations were of necessity more paraphrases than close word-for-word translations: Behn had a good knowledge of French but repeatedly lamented her inability to understand Latin and Greek. With Cowley's weighty Latin work on plants, Behn may well have called on her contemporary, the Protestant dramatist Nahum Tate, to reproduce an oral prose translation of Cowley's Latin hexameters which she then converted into heroic couplets (Todd 1996: 408). Alternatively, she may well have used existing translations which she modified to present the material in her own poetic form and with her own content (Walters 2002: 17).

Behn repeatedly reflected on her own agency in the translation process. If authorship was associated with masculinity, then Behn was acutely aware that she was living in a society 'Permitting not the female Sex to tread/The mighty paths of learned heroes dead' (Walters 2002: 14-15). The prestige of translating directly from the classical languages could never be hers. However, she was able to use her

command of modern languages, coupled with the commercial potential of the French bestsellers she opted to take as her source texts, to make of translation an undertaking which lent her credibility. Despite the fact that publishing such books was an important commercial event in her life, as we can see from some of the covers a certain amount of dissembling and coyness was used to hide her true identity – she writes under the pennames – 'Astrea' / Mrs A. B. – while towards the end of her life and career she demonstrated greater confidence, as can be seen in Fontenelle's piece in which her name is in full and his has disappeared. [Such pen-names were by no means unusual: Katherine Philips was known by her pastoral nom de plume and praised as "The Matchless Orinda," and Behn was likewise apostrophized as "The Incomparable Astrea," an appellation based on the code name she had used when she was a spy in the service of Charles II.] Translation in the Restoration period therefore shared certain characteristics with Restoration drama. It was a play of masks, a form of role play and deception – what Elizabeth Spearing has termed a 'transvestite ventriloquism' – in which Behn was eager to be involved, as she constructed her notion of femininity alongside or in contradiction to the overt masculinity of the texts on which she is working (Spearing 1996: 170).

As the translation theorist Sherry Simon observes, 'We are led to wonder whether translation condemned women to the margins of discourse or, on the contrary, rescued them from imposed silence' (Simon 1996: 46). For Behn, scarcely a woman to be silenced, translation could be used to serve a series of different ends. Elizabeth Spearing suggests, for example, that Behn heightened the erotic treatment of women in her translation of the *Voyage to the Island of Love* by adding passages enhancing their sexual attractiveness and heightened the visual appeal of the writing (Spearing 162-64). Ellen Brinks, referring to the *Voyage to the Isle of Love*, observes that Behn added a further 30 to 40 pages of text precisely to deflate his pastoral, idealised tone and disguise herself behind Tallemant's authorship (Brinks, 1993: 46). Line Cottegnies sets Behn's heightening of the erotic treatment of women against the more negative handling of men in Rochefoucauld's *Maxims.* Here, Cottegnies argues, Behn shifts the meaning of his maxims to become more prescriptive and more critical of the vanity and arrogance of the society around her (Cottegnies 2000, 19; 2004: 226).

2. Aphra Behn as a Translator of Science: 'As far as a Woman's Reasoning can go'

But how much freedom did Behn have in her translation of Fontenelle? And how unusual was it for a woman to be translating scientific texts? Behn was not the only Restoration woman to be involved in science: she had an important precursor in Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73). A good twenty years before Behn's translations, she had published her *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (1666) and a work of science fiction, the *Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1668). She was invited to attend that bastion of male science, the Royal Society of London, in 1667, where she watched a series of experiments staged by the respected scholars Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke. Shortly afterwards the society officially banned women, a ban not lifted until 1945. 'Mad Madge of Newcastle' was of course an exceptional figure in the natural-philosophical activity of the seventeenth century, but also one whose credibility owed much to her husband's standing (Dear 2007: 129). So as a married woman sharing her husband's interest in science, she cut a very different figure from that 'curious' woman in her own right, Aphra Behn.

What was it about Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* that attracted Behn? Firstly Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657 –1757) was a writer of high literary rank, who was a popular figure amongst the educated elite of the period. He enjoyed a position of esteem comparable only to that of Voltaire – with the difference that unlike Voltaire, he avoided making important enemies. Fontenelle had already come to the attention of the English public with his *Dialogues des morts* (1683) [*Dialogues of the Dead*]. This work demonstrated both his erudition and his wit, by presenting invented - but plausible - conversations between groups of dead ancients, groups of dead moderns and a whole book that was devoted to dialogues between one ancient and one modern. It comes as no surprise that his *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* (1686) [*Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds*] should once again use dialogue form as a way to present and debate ideas. The male protagonist, well-versed in the scientific thought of the day, educated the female 'Everywoman' figure (La Marquise/the Marchioness) in

all kinds of astronomical questions. The universe, he teaches us in the opening pages, is nothing more than a watch on a larger scale, a mechanical system whose motions depend on determined laws and the mutual relation of its parts. He then goes on to address the question of how a body as large as the earth can possibly rotate – he likens it to that of a great ship set in motion – and describes the two kinds of motion of the earth – around the sun and upon its own axis. This enables him to explain the apparent rising and setting of the sun, as well as the course of the earth in relation to other planets. More intriguingly, he reflects that the atmosphere of the moon does not contain the dense vapours found in the earth's atmosphere so inhabitants of the moon would never have seen a rainbow. Their air was also such that they would be drowned if they entered the earth's atmosphere and fall lifeless to the ground. Those folks living on Venus would altogether be a livelier bunch, given that they were two-thirds closer to the sun than earthlings and would be a sun-burnt, sun-scorched people like the Moors of Granada. Climate theory of the period dictated that these figures were always in love, listening to music, having galas, dances and tournaments (Fontenelle 1803: 84-5). That was nothing, though, in comparison with the inhabitants of Mercury, where the sun appears nine times brighter than on earth. They were 'mad with vivacity': Mercury was the 'bedlam of the universe' (Fontenelle 1803: 85).

As with other translations Behn dedicates Fontenelle's work to male patrons – James Douglas, Earl of Drumlangrig (1662-1711) and his son William, Lord High Treasurer of Scotland (1637-95) – articulating a modesty that quickly shifts into self-assurance. As she says of her translation:

> If it is not done with that exactness it merits, I hope your Lordship will pardon it in a *Woman*, who is not supposed to be well versed in the Terms of Philosophy, being but a new beginner in that Science […] and if it finds acceptance with your Lordship, I am already so much a Philosopher, as to despise what the *World* says of it (Behn, *Works* IV: 72)

Of equal concern to Behn was the structure and character constellation of Fontenelle's narrative. It turned upon a conversation between an ignorant, but eager Marquess and her knowledgeable and intelligent male companion. As Behn complained:

> The Design of the Author is to treat of this part a Natural Philosophy in a more familiar Way than any other hath done, and to make every body understand him: For this End

> he introduceth a Woman of Quality as one of the Speakers in these five Discourses, whom he feigns never to have heard of any such thing as Philosophy before. […] And for his Lady *Marquiese*, he makes her say a great many very silly things, tho' sometimes she makes Observations so learned, that the greatest Philosophers in *Europe* could make no better. (Behn, *Works* IV: 77)

The treatment of the Marchioness therefore troubled Behn, given that Fontenelle appeared to be working on the stereotypical assumption that women were not able to cultivate their own minds and were intellectually inferior. While the Royal Society, founded in 1660 – a mere twenty years or so before Behn was working – built upon the Baconian scientific paradigms of empiricism, observation and experimentation, the language of modern science also had a bearing on the construction of gender, power and knowledge. Women were metaphorically equated with nature, and man with the mind. Women's involvement in scientific knowledge transmission – in ways other than passive reception and consumption – therefore pressed on the conventions of female propriety.

From the outset, Behn, was careful to adopt an unusually faithful translation of Fontenelle's *Entretiens* on the basis of the fact that she was unwell and under pressure of time: 'And I resolv'd either to give you the French Book into English, or to give you the subject quite changed and made my own; but having neither health nor leisure for the last I offer you the first such as it is' (Behn, *Works* IV, 86). And while Fontenelle's text was only rarely 'changed and made my own' by Behn in her translation, she used the remainder of her translator's preface to disregard the rather fanciful, unlearned discussions in Fontenelle about the possible habitation of other planets. Rather, she spends a good two thirds (16 pages of 25) of her preface making her contribution to the fierce debates of the seventeenth century between scripture and science.

> The other thing [Fontenelle] endeavours to defend and assert, is, the System of *Copernicus*. As to this, I cannot but take his part as far as a Woman's Reasoning can go. I shall not venture upon the Astronomical part, but leave that to the Mathematicians; but because I know, that when this Opinion of Copernicus (as to the Motion of the Earth, and the Sun's being fixed in the Centre of the Universe, without any other Motion, but upon his own Axis) was first heard of in the World, those who neither understood the old System of *Ptolemy*, nor the new of *Copernicus* said, That this new Opinion was expressly contrary to the holy Scriptures, and therefore not to be embraced; (Behn, *Works* IV: 78)

While Behn purports to be a mere beginner in science, she demonstrates her ability to engage in learned debate by weighing up well over twenty Biblical passages, predominantly from the Old Testament, which seem to speak against the Copernican system and, through ingenious interpretation, suggests how they could be made to complement rather than counter modern scientific thought.

Much has been made of discussing Behn's prefatory essay in relation to her other translation work and prose fiction. Here I'd like to focus on how her translation of the *Entretiens* compares with two other translations – by men – which appeared around the same time as hers: Sir William Domvile's *A Discourse on the Plurality of Worlds* (1687) and John Glanvill's *A Week's Conversation on the Plurality of Worlds* (1688). Domvile (1656-98) was Attorney General to Ireland and was probably prompted to translate the work by his son-in-law William Molyneux, was an Irish natural philosopher and Fellow of the Royal Society. Glanvill (1664?-1735) was cast in an altogether different mould: a scholar of Oxford, freshly expelled from All Souls College for drunkenness and swearing, he had just started turning his hand to translation. So the need for Behn to declare her translation 'Wholly new' is done to see off the competition.

I would argue, for example, that the feistiness of Behn's preface can be read not only as an opportunity to air her proto-feminist views but to launch a counter-offensive against dour Domvile. He writes in his preface:

> I was once inclin'd (there being a Woman concern'd in the Discourse) to have addres'd it to the Fair ones of that Sex; but when I consider'd, that they themselves make up the glorious number of those Planets that influence and adorn our Globe, and that t'is the great Business of Mankind to discover their Vortices, I declin'd that thought, and concluded it a Work more proper for Men. (Fontenelle 1687: unpaginated)

This statement was swiftly modified by Molyneux, Domvile's son-in-law, by way of a note to the Bookseller:

> and how far the present Treatise surpasses those both for Ingenuity and pleasant Fancy, will be evident to all knowing Readers, particularly the female Sex, that desire to become Philosophers, and acquainted in the World they live in (Fontenelle 1687: unpaginated)

So Domvile's translation was deeply ambivalent in the audience it addressed, and it comes as no surprise that he should describe the Marquiese and her ilk as 'women' rather than Behn's 'fair Lady' and 'fair sex'.

Domvile also had a political agenda to follow and saw translation as a means of furthering national debate on science:

> The following Discourse I receiv'd from you in French; […] But when I consider'd his Chimerical Design (let us suppose it such) of inlarging the French Monarchy beyond the Moon, (for all Discoverys of the Subject belong to the Sovereign;) I grew jealous of the Attempt, and concern'd for the Honour of our Nation, we have hitherto outdone the French by the Progress of our Arms in *this World*, why should we fall short of them in our Discovery of *others* […] I have therefore rectify'd his French Telescope the best I could for the use of an English eye (Fontenelle 1687: unpaginated)

There are no such reflections on national superiority in Behn's preface: rather, she comments on the linguistic otherness of the original and the difficulties of working from French into English.

It is my impression that Behn also knew of Glanvill's work. In discussions about whether or not the moon might be populated, some had argued that this was obviously not the case, since no life forms had been sighted on it. Fontenelle had argued that just because we cannot see any life forms does not mean they do not exist: the sheer distance between the earth and the moon precluded scientists from drawing any firm conclusions. Behn's faithful translation of Fontenelle's Paris-focused argumentation read thus:

> Suppose then, there had never been any Commerce between *Paris* and St *Denis*, and that a Citizen of *Paris*, who had never been out of that City, shou'd go up to the top of the Steeple of our Lady, and shou'd view St *Denis* at a distance, and one shou'd ask him if he believ'd St *Denis* to be inhabited. (Behn, *Works* IV: 112)

Glanvill had adopted a domesticating strategy, setting this scene in London:

> Suppose there had never been any Communication between *London* and *Greenwich*, and a Cockney, who was never beyond the Walls of *London*, saw *Greenwich* from the top of the Pyramid; you ask him if he believes *Greenwich* is inhabited as *London* is? (Fontenelle 1688, tr. Glanvill: 36)

I am sure that it is this that Behn is commenting on in her introduction when she says:

> I thought *Paris* and *St. Denis* fitter to be made use of as Examples, to compare the Earth and the Moon to, than *London* and *Greenwich*; because St. *Denis* having several

> Steeples and Walls, is more like Paris, then *Greenwich* is to *London*. *Greenwich* has no Walls, and but one very low Steeple, not to be seen from the Monument without a Prospective Glass [i.e. telescope]. (Behn, *Works* IV: 86)

This prefatory note, in combination with the translation she gave, therefore demonstrated not only that she had considered the various translation strategies she could adopt – whether domesticating or foreignising – but had also weighed them up in terms of the message that Fontenelle had wished to convey and the scientific principles underlying it.

3. British Women as Facilitators in Scientific Knowledge Exchange

It's with the translation by Elizabeth Gunning, née Plunkett, of Fontenelle's work published in 1803 that I would like to move into the third and final section of this lecture. Her *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* appeared in a version edited by the astronomer Jérôme le Français De La Lande. Gunning's name was on the title-page but no translator's preface was appended. The work was extended, this time by its male editor and not by its female translator, to include a sixth evening's dialogue on the heavens by Lalande which closed with the assertion that "Europe is in possession of a degree of genius which has never extended to any part of the globe" – a degree of genius that presumably extended to his good self. Thus, while the English translator was at least visually present in the work, it was the voice of the male editor that dominated in this edition, with only a little learned footnoting from Gunning.

The context was a very different one into which Fontenelle's work was projected in nineteenth-century Britain and it was one in which women's interest in producing science (through translation) and consuming science (through reading) was a much less awkward affair. It was a far cry from the work of the renowned early eighteenth-century translator Elizabeth Carter, who was a deeply 'invisible' figure in her English rendering of Francesco Algarotti's *Il Newtonianismo per le dame: ovvero Dialoghi sopra la luce e il colore* (1737), translated as Sir Isaac Newton's *Philosophy Explained for the Use of Ladies* (1739): the name of the translator was not printed on the frontispiece, and Carter did not write any preface for the work.

Women's involvement in scientific translation swiftly gained pace towards the end of the Enlightenment as elementary works on botany, geology and chemistry began to appear. They were geared towards an audience of women and children, and scientific study could become a more inclusive undertaking. In botanical poetry, for example, we find the English translation by Maria Henrietta Montolieu née Heywood (Hayward?) of Jacques Delille's best-selling *Les Jardins, ou l'art d'embellir* (1789/1801) which appeared as *The Gardens, A Poem* (1798/1805). Similarly the first English rendering of the Swiss botanist Albrecht von Haller's immensely successful poem on the flora and fauna of the Alps, *Die Alpen*, was produced by a 'Mrs J. Howorth' for her translation collection *Poems of Baron Haller* published with Bell in London in 1794. Howorth, a close friend of the leading British botanist Sir James Edward Smith, used translation as a means of demonstrating her virtuosity on a linguistic, cultural and scientific level (see Martin 2012). It is likewise surprising that Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's seminal piece on plant evolution *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*, should not appear until 1863 as the *Essay on the Metamorphosis of Plants* in a translation by Emily M. Cox: Cox, like Howorth, currently eludes further biographical reconstruction but she was a corresponding member of the Dresden Botanical Society.

Some female translators sought invisibility, working within the female modesty topos, while others were forced into this position by publishers, editors and spouses. Recovering such women from historical oblivion is a difficult task that tends to cast their contribution as disproportionately great. While I obviously consider it important that women played such a central role in the transfer of scientific writing into English, I do not necessarily seek to present them as anomalous figures, proto-feminists blazing a trail through the domain of 'male' science. Indeed Pnina G. Abir-Am and Dorinda Outram eloquently warn of the distorting nature of gendered histories which over-enthusiastically try to reconstruct women's roles in science (Abir-Am and Dorinda Outram, 1987: 1-16). In the spirit of Jean Delisle's collected volume on eighteenth-century female translators, *Portraits de traductrices* (2002), I am more interested in understanding how women deployed scientific translation for their own intellectual ends and how they presented themselves as scientifically curious individuals and what kinds of power they wielded over the style and content of the target text (Delisle 2002).

Certainly most research on women translators tends to be 'archaeological' in nature, and much of my current work on British women as facilitators of scientific knowledge exchange in the early nineteenth century has involved combing publishers' ledgers and correspondences to find out which women were behind the translation of which scientific texts. Not all publishers were so benighted that they failed to acknowledge the translator on the title-page, nor indeed were all women so modest that they would rather go unnamed. Henry Bohn, a publisher of German origin and himself a translator, had no qualms about giving his female translators their due. His translators, male and female, all enjoyed high visibility, not just on the title-page. Translators' prefaces and annotations were by no means unusual in the various series or 'Libraries' that he published. Bohn therefore did not balk at translatorial 'presence'. Around 150 translators worked for Bohn or his successors George Bell and Daldy between 1846 and the turn of the twentieth century, at least twenty-seven of whom were women and who between them were responsible for translating or co-translating just under a fifth of the output of his libraries. Where women had no hand in preparing titles for the Classical or Antiquarian Libraries – presumably because Latin and Greek remained male bastions of learning – women did have a role to play in the translation from modern languages of works for the Standard Library, which ranged broadly across history, literature, theology and philosophy.

More surprisingly, perhaps, women translators were equally well represented in the 'Scientific Library'. Of the eleven translated works among the fifty-four titles in this series, four were translated or co-translated by women. These included Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos* (1849-58), *Views of Nature* (1850) and *Personal Narrative* (1852-53), as well as the Danish physicist Hans Christian Ørsted's *Soul in Nature* (1852), translated from the German by the Horner sisters Leonora and Joanna. The Horner sisters were also responsible for producing English versions of accounts by the pioneering Prussian archaeologist Carl Richard Lepsius and the German botanist Karl Koch – the *Letters from Egypt, Ethiopia and the Peninsula of Sinai* (Bohn, 1853) and *The Crimea and Odessa: Journal of a Tour, with an Account of the Climate and Vegetation* (Murray, 1855). So by the end of the nineteenth century, women were actually

making a name and a career for themselves as scientific translators. They had, then, written themselves indelibly into the international transmission and circulation of scientific knowledge.

Conclusions

To conclude, I have been cautious about charting the development of a 'tradition' of British women's involvement in science through translation or indeed of suggesting any linear development or any smooth increase in the involvement of women. But it is possible to see that women's participation in translation steadily increases from the period in which Aphra Behn worked, through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century and peaking around the 1860s, before the natural sciences acquired a complexity that rendered them difficult to tackle by those who were not 'professional' scientists. Behn's translations are an interesting starting point in understanding just how intimately scientific writing connected to some of the preoccupations of the age – about national identity, artistic creativity and women and society. Translation not only pointed up the centrality of language in shaping the boundaries between the silent and the speaking woman: it demonstrated how 'curious' women such as Behn could harness the creative potential of translation to engage politically, culturally and intellectually with the issues of their day.

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