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FASHIONING THE QUEEN - ELIZABETH I AS PATRON OF TRANSLATIONS

OANA-ALIS ZAHARIA

“Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University, Bucharest,
176, Splaiul Independenței 176, sect.4, Bucharest
oanaalispopescu@yahoo.com

Abstract: The present paper aims to explore the role of Queen Elizabeth I as literary patron and dedicatee of translations by focusing on the dedication that precedes Geoffrey Fenton’s rendering of Francesco Guicciardini’s *Storia d’Italia*. Fenton’s extensive dedication to the Queen is extremely revealing of the manner in which the system of patronage was understood in Elizabethan England. Moreover, it facilitates our understanding of the translator’s role and position at the Elizabethan court, of the political and cultural implications of choosing the Queen as the patron of a translation.

Keywords: literary patronage, translation, Queen Elizabeth I

Introduction

Regarded as a powerful storehouse of fundamental information on matters of state, war, politics and foreign affairs, Francesco Guicciardini’s *Storia d’Italia* was extremely popular with the sixteenth century European audience. There is ample evidence of the book’s circulation and popularity in the Ialian, French, Dutch, Spanish and English intellectual circles of the time (Burke 2007:132). While Renaissance Englishmen such as William Cecil, Philip Marnix and the Scottish King James VI and I owned the 1566 Latin translation of Guicciardini’s *Storia*, English translations of both Machiavelli and Guicciardini could be found in the libraries of Sir Edward Coke and William Byrd (131). In 1579, the year of Geoffrey Fenton’s English translation of the book, Gabriel Harvey famously stated in his correspondence with Edmund Spenser that Cambridge scholars were thoroughly acquainted with the works of such important

European writers as Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Phillip de Commines, Baldassare Castiglione and Stefano Guazzo (Harvey 1884:79-80).

The present paper aims to explore the role of Queen Elizabeth I as literary patron and dedicatee of translations by focusing on the dedication that precedes Geoffrey Fenton's translation of Francesco Guicciardini's *Storia d'Italia*. Fenton's extensive dedication to the Queen helps us gain insight into the Elizabethan understanding of the system of patronage, of the relationship between patron and translator/writer and the role and status of the translator. It brings to light the relation of interdependence that existed between patron and translator: on the one hand, the noble or royal patron offered the translator financial support or royal favour, acknowledged the name of the translator and certified that the translation had merit and was worth reading; on the other hand, the translator had the power to fashion in his dedication the figure of the patron, thus reflecting the circulation of power from subject to ruler and vice versa. Thus, Fenton glorifies Elizabeth as the ideal ruler, successively associating her image and rule with the imperial image of the Roman emperor Augustus, with the humanist model of the ideal prince and with the qualities embodied by Lorenzo de Medici – Guicciardini's favourite ruler. The dedication anticipates Fenton's rewriting and domesticating of Guicciardini's text for political and ideological reasons.

The first English translation of Guicciardini's "History of Italy"

Francesco Guicciardini's life and reputation were relatively familiar to the Elizabethan audience when Geoffrey Fenton published his translation of *Storia d'Italia* in 1579, a rendering based on the 1568 French translation of Jérôme Chomedey. In his dedication to the Queen, Fenton states that he refrained from commenting on Guicciardini's "life and learning" since this matter had been "testified with sufficient credit and reputation in the high negotiations and employments which he managed long time under great Princes, Popes, and common weales" (Fenton 1579: Aiiij). What Fenton chooses to emphasise is Guicciardini's integrity, his objectivity as a historian, his ability to recount past events without allowing any "humaine affection" (Aiiij) to make him distort the truth of the story. Moreover, Fenton astutely points out the historian's perspicacity in setting down the causes of the events he is telling, one of the modern features of Guicciardini's historical writing.

However, Fenton's admiration for Guicciardini's work did not prevent him from manipulating the original in order to make it ideologically acceptable to the Elizabethan audience of his time. While the French translation keeps extremely close to the source text, rendering most of it word for word, Fenton frequently departs from the text in order to insert his own moral and value judgements.

Given the fact that Guicciardini's *History* described the direct role of England in the international context of the Italian wars, including numerous references to English kings and detailed accounts of the wars and historical events in which they were involved, his book must have presented special interest to Elizabethan Englishmen. Guicciardini focused on the period 1490-1534 which followed the Tudors' rise to royal power in England. The book covers a large part of the reign of Henry VII and most of the reign of Henry VIII and his involvement in the wars sweeping Europe in the sixteenth century.

Fenton, a convinced Protestant and resolute supporter of the Queen, makes his translation conform to the Tudor myth and the propaganda accompanying it during the reigns of both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. The fact that Guicciardini gave a detailed account in his *History* of the Tudors' accession to the throne of England, thus emphasising the legitimacy of Henry VIII's rule and implicitly of Elizabeth's reign, made it an ideal text to be appropriated and domesticated by the Elizabethan translator.

The purpose of the translation

By listing in the first lines of his dedication the reasons that disposed him to offer his translation to the Queen, Fenton implicitly supplies us with the motives that lay behind his decision to choose for translation Guicciardini's *History*, allowing us to gain insight into what the Elizabethans found of interest in the Italian culture of the time:

> It is not without reason nor contrarie to example, that I presume to offer vp to the peculiar and graue vievv of your Maiestie, these *my compositions* and labors: for that the generall argument being historicall, a doctrine vvherein your Maiestie farre aboue all other Princes hath a most singular insight and iudgement, and the particular partes conteining discourse of state and

gouernment, in vvhich God hath expressed in the person of your Maiestie a most rare and diuine example to all other Kings of the earth for matter of pollicie and sound administration." (Fenton Aiij)

The reasons that prompted him to translate and to dedicate the translation to the Queen are, therefore, explicitly mentioned: the historical content of the book and the discourse of state and government. They are, of course, embedded in the fulsome flattery of the Queen, who is presented not only as an exceptionally knowledgeable and keen observer of the "doctrine" of history, "far above other Princes", but as a "most rare and divine" (Fenton Aiij) example to be followed in matters of policy and administration by all the other kings of Christendom.

Therefore, Fenton does not present his translation to the Queen for her to use it as a source of inspiration, in the manner of the *speculum principis* advice-books. As she manifests such an "inspired science and spirit to judge of Monuments and events of times" and since she has proven to be such an extremely astute and perceptive ruler as to manage to preserve the "felicitie" of her government and reign during "so perillous and conspiring" times, she is asked to judge and assess the work as a sensible and sharp-sighted connoisseur (Fenton Aiij).

The patron as mediator: 'To The Queenes Most Excellent Maiestie'

The patronage of writers and translators became entirely a secular matter after the dissolution of the monasteries during the reign of Henry VIII, the monarchs and the aristocracy being constantly encouraged to perceive learning as one of the functions of power and authority (Parry 2002:117). In offering his translation to the Queen, Fenton follows the examples of other notable writers whose works had been treasured and prized by the great princes of all ages; just as the root of a tree that is nourished by the earth but needs the light of the sun in order to "bring foorth the blossoms", likewise the wisdom and knowledge that God offered to man needs to be revealed to the whole world by true monarchs who, by means of their authority, have the power to enlighten the common people.

In an aristocratic age, associating the name of a noble and, even more, the powerful figure of the Queen with the publishing of a translation, brought credit to the name of the translator and gave assurance that the contents of the book had merit and did not contain any subversive political or religious matter. Taken under the authority and countenance of the prince, original works and translations could be "with reputation and credite *insinuated* into many peoples, nations, and regiments" (Fenton Aiij). Being an extremely cultivated and learned patron, so familiar with "the doctrine of histories and information of times" (Fenton Aiij), Elizabeth expresses in the form of her government what is only theoretically stated in books and works of authority, "all that which learning and bookes can set downe by rule and precept" (Fenton Aiij). She is "the Lampe", "the terrestrial Sun" that, by the will of God, has to enlighten not only her own people but also "all the Regions and Climats of the whole common weale of Christendome" (Fenton Aiij). Therefore, she plays a mediating role which parallels, even transcends, those of the translator and his translation, taking over the part played by divine providence in many religious texts.

As Graham Parry remarks, a common feature of most Renaissance texts – religious, historical, philosophical - is the frequently expressed belief that the patron "will be a preservative against 'malicious tongues', 'backbiting', 'detraction','serpents' and the like" (Parry 2002:118). These anxieties, often conveyed in powerful language, may indicate that publication exposed the author or the translator to rather robust criticism in the social circles of the sixteenth century:

> There seems to have been widespread resentment against writers, arising from any number of sources – envy, factionalism, small-mindedness, anti-intellectualism, cultural hostility – so that a decision to publish was, in effect, to put one's head above the parapet and be a target for all manner of abuse. (Parry 2002:117-118)

Fenton's dedication expresses precisely the fears common to so many of his contemporaries. Thus, in the end he reverently asks Elizabeth to let the translation pass under her name and authority and to defend it in case there might appear any malevolent persons who would interpret it unfavourably:

> Humbly beseeching your right excellent Maiestie, that where the worke is now to appeare in the open view of the world, and stande before the uncertaine iudgements of so many sundry and straunge humors of men, you will vouchsafe to let it passe vnder the happie name of your Maiestie, and vnder your gracious authoritie to giue it defence and fauor agaynst the emulation of such as eyther through malice or ignorance may rise up to interprete me and my labours sinisterly. (Fenton Aiiij)

While these exceedingly flattering and effusive dedications were at one level a pledge of loyalty and allegiance, they could also represent the translator's or author's attempt to obtain some reward in the form of office or career advancement. If Elizabeth did not directly participate in the system of patronage in strictly financial terms, this did not mean that she could not favour certain courtiers and bestow sought-after positions (Bates 2002:372). Patronage came in all shapes and sizes, from permanent positions to more sporadic offerings or gifts, reflecting the circulation of power from subject to ruler and the other way round which entailed that the Queen, depended in the epoch of "self-fashioning", on courtly poets and image-makers to produce her royal image just as they depended on her royal favour to secure certain position-related ends (372).

Although circulation of power could not be guaranteed to be entirely reciprocal, as in the case for instance of John Lyly who in spite of his most flattering descriptions of Elizabeth and her court in his dramas did not succeed in obtaining the prestigious post of Master of the Revels for which he struggled all his life (Bates 2002:359), Geoffrey Fenton was one of the lucky ones since in 1580 he obtained the post of secretary to the new deputy of Ireland, Lord Grey of Wilton, and thus began his long career in administration.

Fashioning the queen: from Emperor Augustus to Lorenzo Magnifico

All through the Epistle, Fenton extols Elizabeth's government as a moderate and well-tempered one, peace being preserved in her realms only by her divine virtues and qualities. Clearly supporting the principle of divine right, Fenton emphasises time and again Elizabeth's providential appointment, her being Queen by the will of God and her setting as a "divine example" of sound policy, government and administration to all the other kings in Europe. She is described as the perfect embodiment of all the leading Christian virtues and classical qualities that the humanists required as indispensable for the ideal ruler: justice, clemency, constancy, equity, wisdom and virtue**:**

> All Kings, and Kingdomes, and nations rounde about you, rise vp to reuerence in your fourme of gouerning, that propertie of vvisdome and vertue, vvhich it seemes God hath restrayned to your Maiestie onely, vvithout participation to any of them: And in that regarde they holde you that sacred and fixed Starre, vvhose light God vvill not haue put out, *though* the deuises of men on all sides are busie to dravv clovvdes and darke vayles to obscure it. (Fenton Aiij)

Constant reference is made to the plots and hostile environment that surrounded Elizabeth and to her power to suppress and surpass them. It is well known that Queen Elizabeth acceded to the most insecure throne in Europe; at the beginning it was claimed by Philip of Spain in right of his widow, Mary Tudor. Eleven years later, she had to face the revolt of the Catholic northern earls and in 1570, Pope Pius V formally issued a Bull deposing her, releasing her subjects from their allegiance and advocating her assassination. Elizabeth's cousin, the Catholic Mary of Scotland, with powerful connections in France, had a good claim to the English throne (particularly since the rumour that Elizabeth was not only illegitimate, but in any case no daughter of Henry VIII, had been fostered by the papacy); Mary of Scotland had been a virtual prisoner in England since 1568, and was such a constant focus of plots against Elizabeth that she had to be executed in 1587.

These must be "the devises of men on all sides" that try to obscure her "sacred and fixed Star" (Fenton Aiij) with dark veils and clouds that Fenton refers to; but it was all to no avail since God, the almighty authority, would not allow her light to be put out.

Further on, drawing probably both on Virgil's *Aeneid* and on Seneca's *De Clementia*, Fenton likens Elizabeth's reign to that of the first Roman emperor, Augustus, thus supporting Elizabeth's imperial ambitions: "I may with good comelinesse *resemble the gratious reigne of your Maiestie* touching these regions of Christendome, to the happy time and dayes of *Caesar Augustus Emprour of Rome*" (Fenton Aiiij).

The *Aeneid* had been recently translated and published in English (in 1573) by Thomas Phaer and Thomas Twyne. The standard textbook interpretation of the *Aeneid* maintained that it represented a celebration of the renewed power of Rome under the rule of Augustus Caesar. The *Aeneid* served thus to give legitimacy to the reign of Octavian, the first emperor, who was *princeps* and Pater Patriae of Rome. In giving authority to Octavian, the *Aeneid* also legitimated the existence of the empire itself. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil reminded the Roman people of their superiority among other races and peoples, which was often gained by the sword. As a greater people, Romans had the right to impose their laws and rules on other nations, though it was a value to be merciful to the conquered unless necessity required a harsher rule of law. Virgil glorified their Empire and their right to rule over the rest of the world.

Comparing the "the happy time and days" (Fenton Aiij) of Elizabeth's rule to those of Augustus, Fenton implicitly supports the idea of Elizabeth's imperial power and divine superiority.

Furthermore, by emphasising the importance of the ruler's clemency and constancy in the maintenance of peace and the prosperity of the state, Fenton also echoes Seneca's instructions to the prince in *De Clementia* (56 C.E.). Seneca's works and ideas had been disseminated in Renaissance England especially by Erasmus whose own book of advice, *The Education of a Christian Prince,* was heavily informed by Seneca's discourse on the differences between a tyrant and a good king. Seneca's description of Augustus is ambivalent. Stressing that a policy of clemency must characterise a reign from its very beginning, Seneca duly criticises Augustus for having learnt this lesson rather late in his political life. The young Augustus 'was hot-headed, he burned with anger'; in his old age, 'he may have shown moderation and mercy. Of course he did – after staining the sea at Actium with Roman blood." (Seneca 1995:142)

Nevertheless, later, when exemplifying the idea that clemency is a gentle remedy for the disease of injustice, Seneca mentions Augustus' treatment of the treacherous Cinna. Therefore, although Seneca first accuses Augustus of having begun a policy of clemency too late in his political life, in this story he offers his behaviour as an example of the kind of attitude the good prince should adopt (147).

Fenton's description of Augustus draws heavily on Seneca, although he chooses to emphasise mainly the positive side of the rule of Augustus who:

> after a long and generall combustion and harrying of the vvhole vvorlde vvith blood and vvarres, did so reforme and reduce the Regions confining his Empire, that vvith the Scepter and seate of peace he much more preuayled then euer he could haue done vvith the svvord. By his clemencie he brought to submission his neighbours that stoode out agaynst him, and by his constancie helde them assured being once reconciled. (Fenton Aiij-Aiiij)

In his view, the only difference between Elizabeth's rule and that of Augustus is that of time and place. She is herself a "soueraigne *Empresse ouer seuerall nations and languages*" and like Augustus, who due to his wisdom and justice had absolute power in matters "touching quarrels and controuersies of state", she has been given by God "the ballance of power and iustice, to peaze and counterpeaze at your will the actions and counsels of all the Christian kingdomes of your time."(Fenton Aiiij)

The importance of the balance of power is central to Guicciardini's analysis of international relations among the Italian states, a balance that was preserved until 1492 due to Lorenzo de Medici's diplomatic policy.

In drawing his portrait of Elizabeth, Fenton associates her not only with the humanist model of the ideal prince and with the imperial image of Augustus but also with the qualities that Guicciardini praises in Lorenzo de Medici, the ruler whom he celebrates for succeeding in preserving peace among the Italian states during the 1480s.

In the first pages of his book, Guicciardini repeatedly emphasises that this period of tranquillity was mainly established and conserved due to Lorenzo's industry and virtue. Fenton amplifies the historian's description of Lorenzo choosing to translate the Italian "cittadino *tanto eminente sopra 'l grando privato*", as *"a Citisen of Florence, in whom was expressed such an excellencie of spirite and authoritie aboue the other Citisens of that regiment"* (Guicciardini 1579:2). His "excellencie of spirite" reminds us, of course, of Elizabeth's "inspired science and spirit to iudge", while his "authoritie" and position "above the other Citisens" evoke her "authoritie awefull" above all her neighbours and borderers as well as her singularity and superiority among the other princes and kings of Europe (Fenton Aiij).

Realizing that the Florentine republic would be in danger if any of the major Italian states increased its power, Lorenzo strove to ensure that the affairs of Italy were kept in balance and that the existing distribution of power was maintained:

> He knewe well that it would be a thing preiudiciall to the common weale of Florence, and no lesse hurtfull to him selfe, if any of the great Potentates of that nation stretched out further their power, and therefore he employed all his deuises, meanes, and directions that the thinges of Italy should be so **evenly ballanced**, that they shoulde not waigh more on the one side then of the other: A thing which he could not make to succeede, without the preseruation of peace, and a perpetuall care, diligence and watching ouer all accidents yea euen to the least, basest, and most inferior. (Guicciardini 1579:2)

Similarly, Queen Elizabeth is praised for her wisdom and moderation, for her equity and fulfilment "of all the laws and offices of a devoute Neutralitie" (Fenton Aiij).

Elizabeth's qualities and virtues also stand out in opposition to the vices and failings of the rulers and popes that populate Guicciardini's book. Throughout the *History*, Guicciardini vilifies the ambition and cupidity of princes and popes as the most destructive sin of all, as the cause of all troubles and corruption. The examples are multiple and scattered through almost all his historical accounts.

Fenton does not keep his "fashioning" of the image of the Queen within the bounds of his dedication, but extends it to the text of the original, which he frequently alters for ideological reasons. Thus, upon reaching the part recounting the circumstances of Queen Elizabeth's birth, Fenton slightly modifies the text so as to make it conform to the Tudor version of the story: Anne Boleyn is turned from the King's "*innamorata*" [mistress] (Guicciardini 1561, Libro 2, capitolo 7)," into the highly honourable Lady Anne Boleyn, who got pregnant not before her marriage to the King, as Guicciardini states, but after it had been officially pronounced.

Conclusion

The difficulty of pinning down a single, coherent and authoritative theory of translation due to the lack of any theoretical translation treatises in the Tudor era has been noticed by the various translation scholars who have tried to give an account of the principles governing translation in the period.

The largest part of the information we have about Tudor thinking on translation comes from the prefaces, dedications and introductions to particular translations which sometimes contained statements related to the role of translation.

Geoffrey Fenton's dedication to Queen Elizabeth is a gold mine of information, offering us access not only to the Elizabethan understanding of translation but also to the Elizabethans' view of the system of literary patronage. His dedication brings to the fore the political and cultural implications of choosing the Queen as patron of a translation and subtly highlights the relationship of interdependence that existed between patron and translator/writer. Fenton's dedication as well as the text of his translation are indicative of the translator's less-obvious albeit significant power to fashion and construct the image of the Queen herself.

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