The French Translation of Agrippa von Nettesheim’s *Declamatio de incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium: Declamatio as Paradox*

Marc van der Poel

The *Declamatio de incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum et artium atque excellentia verbi Dei* [*Declamation on the Uncertainty and Worthlessness of the Sciences and the Arts, and on the Excellence of the Word of God*], written in 1526 and published in 1530 by Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535), is a good example of a Latin humanist text so popular that it was translated into several vernaculars during its own century. An Italian translation was published in 1547, an English translation in 1569, and a French one in 1582.¹ Written in the political and religious turmoil of the age of Christian humanism, Agrippa’s *Declamatio* was controversial from the moment of its publication. Its author was already known as an enthusiastic student of magic and occultism, and as a neoplatonist who professed that the Hermetic was compatible with orthodox Christian theology. Now, in the *Declamatio*, he was seen to be attacking both clerical and secular authorities. Because of the severity of its criticism of the Roman Church and its apparent inclination toward Lutheranism, the *Declamatio* was, immediately on publication, placed on the index of forbidden books by the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne. In its turn, the Faculty of Theology at Louvain investigated the *Declamatio* at the request of Margaret of Austria, then governor of the Low Countries, and subsequently identified a number of passages as heretical and offensive to Catholics. Agrippa was to defend his *Declamatio* against these charges in two separate works,² but its publication alienated him from the Imperial court at Malines, which had
Marc van der Poel

hitherto employed him as archivist and historiographer.

Throughout the sixteenth century, the *Declamatio* continued to appear on lists of books forbidden to the faithful.³ Judging from the large number of editions, however, it would seem that the various condemnations of the *Declamatio* did not prevent its circulation. Unfortunately, these various editions have not yet been studied in detail, nor have the expurgations in the Latin editions from ca. 1540 onwards. The purged editions omit, in fact, some twenty-one passages, varying in length from a few words to a number of sentences and treating, for the most part, theologians, friars, or the Roman Church as a whole.⁴ It is my intention here to discuss the 1582 French translation (which was based on the full version of the Latin text and meant to be read in French aristocratic circles) and to address the dual questions of how well the French translator followed the Latin text and whether his translation envisaged the same function as the original.

At the time of its translation, the *Declamatio* had a well-defined reputation in France. Agrippa, who had published a study on magic, *De occulta philosophia* [On Occult Philosophy], shortly after the *Declamatio*, was portrayed as a diabolical magician and an atheist in such works, destined for the general public, as the biographical dictionary published by André Thevet in 1584.⁵ Such a negative judgment reflects the bulk of sixteenth-century Christian thinking toward magic and the esoteric tradition. This philosophic tradition must, however, be taken into account to determine the full purport of the *Declamatio*, even if its evaluation was never developed in this perspective during the Renaissance itself, and we shall see that the French translation bears the mark of the Church’s condemnation of magic and Hermetic philosophy. On the other hand, the *Declamatio* had some notoriety in intellectual circles as a sceptical and fideistic text. Thus, Montaigne uses some ten quotations from the *Declamatio* in his *Apologie de Raymond Sebond* [Justification of Raymond Sebond] (1580), the famous essay in which he criticizes human reason and the sciences.⁶ But, at the same time, other
writers claimed that Agrippa was a charlatan and his *Declamatio* a paradox, essentially a rhetorical exercise not intended to convey any serious thought. In France, this judgment was voiced by Jacques Tahureau (1527–55) in his *Dialogues*, published posthumously in 1565. The title of the 1582 French translation indicates that it, too, presented the work in this manner: *Declamation* (changed into *Paradoxe* from the second edition onward) *sur l'incertitude, vanité et abus des sciences*. . . . *Oeuvre qui peut profiter, & qui apporte merveilleux contentement à ceux qui frequentent les Cours des grands Seigneurs, & qui veulent apprendre à discouvrir d'une infinité de choses contre la commune opinion* [Declamation (later Paradox) on the Uncertainty, Worthlessness and Misuse of the Sciences. . . . A Work Which Can Be Profitable and Which Will Bring Satisfaction to Those Who Frequent the Courts of the Nobility, and Who Wish to Learn to Reason on an Infinity of Topics against Commonly Held Opinion]. We shall see that this manner of qualifying the text is, in fact, in conflict with Agrippa’s intention.

Before turning to the textual analysis of the French version, it will be helpful to say something about the contents of Agrippa’s *Declamatio* and on the translator himself, Louis Turquet de Mayerne. The scanty biographical information available on this latter scholar can be summed up in a few sentences. He was born in Lyon around the middle of the century and was among those Huguenots who fled to Geneva after the Saint Bartholomew massacre in 1572. On March 16, 1573, he was registered as “habitant” [resident] of Calvin’s Commonwealth. At some time between 1587 and October 1591, he returned to France and settled once more in Lyon, where he was an elder of his church, and later in Paris, where he died in 1618. His works include a general history of Spain, the first edition of which was published in 1587, and a study on state constitution, published in 1611. This last work was sharply criticized, and Turquet subsequently published an *apologia* shortly before he died. In addition to these original works, he translated a Spanish rhetorical work by the humanist Antonio de Guevara, against court life and
Marc van der Poel

in praise of country life, and Juan Luis Vives’s well-known Latin work *Institutio feminae Christianae [Education of the Christian Woman].* Little is known about Turquet’s ideas and his motivations as writer and translator. He was one of many Huguenots who were to leave France after 1572, but his original writings, as well as his translation of Agrippa’s text, suggest that even in exile he remained a patriot and a supporter of the French monarchy. His 1611 political treatise, however, published some twenty years after his return from Geneva, suggests something of a change of mind: Turquet dedicated his work to the States General of the Republic of the Seven Provinces, and his dedicatory letter contained severe criticism of the Catholic monarchies in general.

As for Agrippa’s *Declamatio*, it is divided into 102 chapters and an epilogue. It is, in part, an encyclopedia of the arts and sciences and, in part, a rich sociological study, albeit with a strong polemical tone. Agrippa is especially critical of those who hold social power, namely church officials and nobility, and it was mainly for this reason that the book gained support in humanist circles. The starting point of Agrippa’s argumentation, expressed in the first chapter, is the observation that the sciences are neither good nor bad in themselves; it is man’s innate wickedness, conditioned by original sin, that makes their outcomes harmful. The structure of the work as a whole is somewhat loose but, nonetheless, carefully planned. A careful reading allows us to discern two principal sections: the first 53 chapters constitute a survey of the arts and sciences, following roughly the traditional scheme of the seven liberal arts, while the remainder, chapters 54 to 102 and the epilogue, is a sociological study based on the detailed observation of political, ecclesiastical, and economic institutions.

Throughout the book, Agrippa’s outlook is highly critical of human behavior, in both its intellectual and social contexts. This attitude leads to a theological tenet, which he expresses in the last few chapters of his work, in which he directly addresses his intellectual peers, the “scienti-
arum professores” [those who profess the sciences]. Only firm belief in the word of God, as expressed in Scripture, helps man overcome his depravity and provides him with a key to truth and sure knowledge. This exhortation to rely on the Bible is accompanied by an appeal for spiritual introspection. The precise philosophical and theological roots of Agrippa’s ideas are not always clear, but they are obviously connected with the complex and not yet fully studied question of the relation between Renaissance magic and Christianity in the sixteenth century.

Turquet’s translation of the *Declamatio* is neither inaccurate nor inflexible, but, as we shall see, he does not hesitate to manipulate his transfer of the original.15 A common feature, evident on virtually every page, is paraphrase by means of binomials: e.g., “ratio” [system] (A, fol. Bv) to “raison & fondement” [system and foundation] (T, p. 18); “tam solicite” [so carefully] (A, fol. Bv) to “tressoigneux & aduise” [most carefully and circumspectly] (T, p. 19); “De Herculis laboribus” [on the labors of Hercules] (A, fol. Ci) to “des travaux & forces d’Hercules” [on the labors and energies of Hercules] (T, pp. 30–31); (“super fumo machinari omnia” [to invent all kinds of vain things] (A, fol. Cij) to “faisans sur tout estat & pratique de fumee & vaine ostentation” [executing everything in the form of smoke and empty show] (T, p. 34); “seuerissimis legibus” [with the most severe laws] (A, fol. Cij) to “sous grandes & rigoureuses peines” [under extensive and rigorous penalties] (T, p. 37); “argumentis” [with arguments] (A, fol. Cvi) to “par raisons & arguments” [with reasons and arguments] (T, p. 47); “ciuilibus officiis” [to civic duties] (A, fol. Cvi) to “aux charges & affaires publique” [to public responsibilities and business] (T, p. 51); “intellectualem naturam” [intellectual nature] (A, fol. Dij) to “nature spirituelle & intellectuelle” [intellectual and spiritual nature] (T, p. 60); “templa” [churches] (A, fol. Mvi) to “temples, cloistres” [temples, cloisters] (T, p. 269); “pugnant pro” [they fight for] to “valident &
Marc van der Poel

approuuent” [they confirm and approve]; “dirimunt” [they break up, dissolve] to “rompent & separent” [they break and separate]; and “prouentus” [outcome, profit] to “proffit & commodité” [profit and benefit] (A, fol. Nviij; T, p. 300). In the chapter on painting, paraphrase turns the maxim “cumque ars summa sit, ingenium tamen utrae artem est” (A, fol. Eviij) [although technical skill is of the highest importance, talent is even more so] into a long statement concerning painting: “Et combien que l’art, l’industrie, & exercice de la peincture soit excellent & de grand avantage à celuy qui en fait estat, si est ce que le naturel luy sert encor dauantage, & est pardessus tout” (T, p. 104) [And although skill, industriousness, and practice in painting are excellent and greatly advantageous to whomever makes a career of it, the fact remains that natural talent is more useful to him, moreso than anything else]. As we can see, this style of translation subjugates neither target to source nor source to target. The recourse to binomial forms not only gives the translator a free hand in the exploration of the semantic richness of the source language but also helps to make the sentence rhythms of the target language more flowing and, thus, contributes to a more pleasing style.

Turquet frequently alters the ordering of items. Thus, “in solo vsu maiorum autoritateque” [according to the sole usage and authority of our elders] (A, fol. Bv) becomes “en l’autorité & vsage” [the authority and usage] (T, p. 18); “vtrum Aristotelis anima scribi debeat endelechia per delta vel entelechia per tau” [whether Aristotle’s (word for) “soul” should be written endelechie with a delta, or entelechie with a tau] (A, fol. Bvi) becomes “si l’ame d’Aristote doit estre escritte Entelechie par t, ou Entelechie par d” [whether Aristotle’s “soul” must be written Entelechie with a t, or Entelechie with a d] (T, p. 21); “blandiri, & res suas enarrare” [to flatter, and to detail one’s business] (A, fol. Cvi) becomes “donner à entendre ses affaires, de flatter quand il est besoing” [to give account of one’s business, and to flatter when it is necessary]
(T, p. 47); “pronuntiationem, memoriam” [pronunciation, memory] (A, fol. Cvi΄) becomes “la mémoire, la prononciation” [memory, pronunciation] (T, p. 47); “haecceitatibus, instantibus” (A, fol. Dvij΄) becomes “instants, heceïtés” (T, p. 62); “Polymestrem & Saccadam Archiuum” (A, fol. Dviij΄) becomes “Sacadas Argien et Polymestres” (T, p. 80); and “sacerdotum monachorumque collegia” [colleges of priests and monks] (A, fol. Mvi΄) becomes “colleges de moynes, & chanoines” [colleges of monks and canons] (T, p. 269). These changes in word-order contribute to the enhancement of the rhythm and harmony of the target text, but at little or no cost to fidelity to the original. Thus they further illustrate a degree of stylistic or linguistic sensitivity on Turquet’s part. Such refusal to be too tightly bound by the semantic dictates of the source text exemplifies the concern for both accuracy and flexibility mentioned earlier.

Single words or groups of words are sometimes omitted: e.g., “quam ars” [than an art] (A, fol. Bi΄; cf. T, p. 6); “deque variis impedimentis constructionis” [on the various impediments of grammatical construction] (A, fol. Bvi΄; cf. T, p. 21); “isonomiam” [equality of political rights] (A, fol. Bvi΄; cf. T, p. 22); “saepe” [often] (A, fol. Bvi΄; cf. T, p. 22); “semper” [always] (A, fol. Cvii΄; cf. T, p. 51); “sero admodum” [rather late] (A, fol. Dvυ; cf. T, p. 69); “regi” [to the king] (A, fol. Dvii΄; cf. T, p. 75); and “quam plurimos” [as many as possible] (A, fol. Kij΄; cf. T, p. 208). In some instances, Turquet makes what we may suppose to be an unintentional mistake, as when he translates “Pleton” [Gemisthus Plethon, the Byzantine philosopher who died in 1452] as “Platon” [Plato] (A, fol. Ivι; T, p. 195), or “rhetoricam” [rhetoric] as “republique” [republic] (A, fol. Cvij; T, p. 53). However, in the chapter on common courtiers, where mention is made of the murder of Phocus, the Greek eponym of Phocis, we find that Turquet corrects the source text, in which Agrippa had written “Proteus” (A, fol. Pv), identified in the Odyssey as a god of the sea: Turquet rightly changes this to “Pelee”
Marc van der Poel

[Peleus] (T, p. 338). Occasionally, a translation is somewhat vague: “in bonorum cognitione” [in the knowledge of good things] (A, fol. Bi\textsuperscript{v}) becomes “en la connaissance du bien” [in the knowledge of the good] (T, p. 7); “loquendi regulas videlicet constructus, regimini & significatorum” [the rules of speech, that is, of the construction of words, of grammatical requirements, and of meanings] (A, fol. Bv\textsuperscript{v}) becomes “des reigles pour sçavoir accompagner les dictions par certain ordre, & selon certaines significations” [rules to know how to group sayings together in a certain order, and according to certain meanings] (T, p. 17); and “de terminorum passionibus” [on the properties of terms] (A, fol. Diij\textsuperscript{v}) becomes “des passions, des termes” [on passions, on terms] (T, p. 62). Most of these omissions and free translations are opportune in that they avoid unnecessary difficulties and make for greater readability. The controlling factor continues to be essentially rhetorical in nature—the desire to produce a text sufficiently respectful of the norms of the target language to please and inform the French reader.

Concern for the readership is evinced in other ways. Various changes suggest that the translator attempts to accommodate the reader who is less familiar with the fields of scholarship and the learned languages. Difficult terms may be defined: “theses, hypotheses” [theses, hypotheses] (A, fol. Cvii\textsuperscript{v}) to “theses ou questions generales, & particulieres ou hypotheses” [theses, or general questions, and particular questions, or hypotheses] (T, p. 48); “quiditates” [quiddities] (A, fol. Diij\textsuperscript{v}) to “quidités (c’est l’essence propre de ce que lon veut demonstrer)” [quiddities, that is, the particular essence of what one wants to demonstrate] (T, p. 59); “arithmetica haec” [this art of arithemetic] (A, fol. Dvij\textsuperscript{v}) to “ceste science d’Arithmetique ou des nombres” [this science of Arithmetic, or numbers] (T, p. 73); “tricolus” [a game of chance, making use of numbers] (A, fol. Dvij\textsuperscript{v}) to “le tricole, ou trois pointcts” [the triculus, or triple-point] (T, p. 75); “Aborigines” [aboriginals] (A, fol. Gvij\textsuperscript{v}) to “Aborigenes, ou originaires Latins” [aboriginals, or the original Latins]
The French Translation of Agrippa Von Nettesheim

(T, p. 151); “augurum collegium” [college of augurers] (A, fol. Gvijv) to “vn college, cour, ou compagnie d’un certain nombre d’augurs” [a college, court or company of a certain number of augurers] (T, p. 151); “goetia atque theurgia” (A, fol. Hiiijv) to “ces impostures que les Grecs appellent Goëtie & Theurgie” [these shams that the Greeks call goetia and theurgia] (T, p. 166); and “circa membranam epicranidem” [around the membrane of the brain] (A, fol. Ivv) to “autour de la taye qui couure le test, qu’il appelle membrane epicranide” [around the skin which covers the head, which he calls the epicranial membrane] (T, p. 194).

Other words are more amply explained: “prima artium illarum (sc. the trivium) elementa instrumentaque” [the first elements and instruments of the trivium] (A, fol. Biijv) to “les petits commencements & instruments d’icelles, a sçavoir les lettres A, B, C, D etc.” [the small beginnings and instruments of the trivium, namely the letters A, B, C, D and so on] (T, p. 13); “in obeliscis” [on obelisks] (A, fol. Biijv) to “en leurs esguilles ou colonnes pyramidales” [on their needles or pyramidal columns] (T, p. 14); “praenestinas tesseras & talos, & aleas” [die-cubes used in the town of Praeneste, knuckle-bones used for games, and dice] (A, fol. Djv) to “le sort ou diuination qui se fait par le iect de dés, comme anciennement en la ville de Palest[r]ine, lors dite Preneste, par les tales, qui estoyent presque ressemblans aux osselets des pieds des animaux” [the fortune or divination done with a throw of the dice, as formerly in the town of Palest[r]ina, then called Praeneste, with “tales,” which were almost like the knuckle bones from animal feet] (T, p. 73); “Anapaesto pede” [in the anapaestic meter] (A, fol. Eif) to “deux breues et vne longue, tā rā tām” [two shorts and a long: tā rā tām] (T, p. 81); and “spondeo pede” [in the spondaic meter] (A, fol. Eif) to “le pied & la mesure de deux longues” [the foot and the beat of two longs] (T, p. 82).

In the chapter on grammar, Agrippa had lamented that grammatical issues have sometimes led to religious problems. He cites the example of the heresy of the Antidicomarianites (A, fol. Bvijv), according to

A general consideration of the varieties of textual amendment dis-
cussed hitherto allows us to see that Turquet adapts his material with the non-scholarly reader in mind. There is a clear pedagogical purpose to his definitions and paraphrasing of technical terms, his explanations by recourse to etymology, and his insertion of explanatory remarks on learned authors with whom the readership could be assumed to be unfamiliar. In combination with the previously illustrated strategies aimed at securing stylistic fluency, such adaptations indicate that many of Turquet’s techniques are essentially linguistic in inspiration. They seem generally to aim at making the thought of the original more accessible to readers who, in their ignorance of the source language, could not be expected to grasp the associative values that could be taken for granted when writing for those competent in Latin.

Of more far-reaching substance, however, we find an important number of what we might term conceptual, rather than linguistic, changes in certain passages containing controversial political or religious judgments. Like many of the linguistic changes detailed above, they might seem relatively minor if considered in isolation, but taken together they reveal an undisputable and dramatic shift in the hermeneutic process. What we have seen so far reveals a translator sufficiently respectful of the source text to make of his translation strategies a means of contextualizing Agrippa’s thought for readers unfamiliar with either the Latin language or the cultural assumptions that automatically go with it. We shall now review cases in which the translator becomes more an audacious agent of change than a deferential agent of transfer, as he tampers with the thought of the original for what we can assume to be ideological or doctrinal reasons. And it is modifications of this type, ultimately more seditious and far more destructive of the source text than those of the earlier kind, that enable us to sense not only Turquet’s linguistic approaches to translation but also his appreciation of translation as a rhetorical strategy. In his hands, the Latin Declamatio, which had issued such a major intellectual and spiritual challenge to its

315
Marc van der Poel

scholarly readers, is converted into a kind of parlor-game, a conventional
‘paradox,” little more than an unequivocal, unoffensive, and entertaining
book for the upper class French reading public invoked on its title
page.\footnote{22}

First, Turquet intervenes in two passages containing derogatory
remarks about the French monarchy and the Court, once by altering the
text and once by placing a critical note in the margin. In the chapter
dealing with court life, Agrippa had claimed that courtiers are usually
very poor political advisors because of their obsequious attitude toward
the king. One of his examples referred to the contemporary situation. He
pointed out that the French monarch followed the bad advice of his
counsellors and engaged in a calamitous conflict with the Emperor (A,
fol. Piij'). Turquet omits this criticism of the French diplomatic policy
of the 1520s and writes simply that Royal courts have poor counsellors,
as much in France as elsewhere (T, p. 334). The other passage occurs in
the chapter on the origins of the nobility and the monarchies in
contemporary society. Agrippa had mentioned the violent ascent to
power of the medieval king Hugh Capet and had added that he was
popular with the population of Paris because of his valor, even though
he was not of noble birth (A, fol. Si'). Turquet translates this passage in
full, but comments in a marginal annotation that this story is not
believable and has been corrupted by those who hate the French
monarchy (T, p. 397). Although Turquet lived in exile during the
eighties, the dedicatory letter to Henry III in the first edition of his
history of Spain, published in 1587 (that is, five years after our transla-
tion), suggests that he remained even in exile loyal to France and a firm
supporter of the monarchy. We can also surmise that Turquet was fearful
of the unfavorable reception of his translation in France if it included
such remarks as these, which might be taken as an expression of his
disapproval of the system of monarchy. The polemic that was to sur-
round his political treatise of 1611, in which he did in fact propose that
The monarch be removed from the center of political institutions, shows that such a fear would not have been without foundation.

Second, Turquet intervenes in a number of passages that were critical of the Protestants, or that he considered inappropriate in a work destined for the general public. In particular, he abridges or expunges three passages containing critical remarks on the opponents of the Roman Church. In his chapter on rhetoric, Agrippa had pointed out that eloquence was often used by unscrupulous people for evil purposes, especially in the fields of politics, jurisprudence, and religion. One example of unprincipled men in the domain of religion had related to contemporary issues: are not all the leaders of the German heretical sects, so numerous today since the appearance of Luther, eloquent men both in speech and writing, Agrippa had asked rhetorically (A, fol. Di\textsuperscript{v}). Turquet omits this harsh judgment of Luther and the Protestant movement in Germany (T, p. 56). Later, Agrippa’s mention of Martin Luther as an unremitting heretic is deleted from a sentence referring to Luther’s views on the rules for marriage (A, fol. Oi\textsuperscript{v}; T, p. 302). Turquet further suppresses the last two sentences of the chapter on images, in which Agrippa had condemned the various forms of superstition related to images, such as the excessive worship of relics. In the omitted passage, Agrippa had pointed out that the contrary of this fault (the excessive disrespect of relics) also led to the adoption of heretical positions, and he had mentioned as examples of the victims of such heresy the contemporary participants of the German Protestant movement (A, fol. Lv\textsuperscript{R-v}; T, p. 241).

Other altered passages have a less specific thrust, and we can assume that Turquet probably altered or deleted them in order to avoid raising questions concerning orthodoxy among his readers. A few such cases have bearing on magic and Hermetism: in the chapter on various forms of trickery ("De praestigiis") [On Impostures], Agrippa had spoken of those who misused magic, a field in which he himself had been active.
Marc van der Poel
during his entire life. After proclaiming that he wished to recant whatever erroneous opinions he had held during his youth, Agrippa added:

“Tandem hoc profeci quod sciam quibus rationibus oporteat alios ab hac pernicie dehortari” (A, fol. Iijr) [Now I have made such progress, that I know on which grounds I must dissuade others from this calamity].

These grounds are specifically mentioned and amount to a definition of the conditions under which the practice of magic is permissible: “Qui-cunque enim non in veritate, nec in virtute dei, sed in elusione daemonum, secundum operationem malorum spirituum, diuinare & prophetare praesumunt, . . . aeternis ignibus cruciandi destinabuntur” (A, fol. Iijr"v) [For whoever dares to divine and prophesy, not in truth and in the power of God, but, through the trickery of demons, in keeping with the operation of bad spirits . . . , will be tormented by eternal fire].

Turquet, however, did not translate the crucial words quibus rationibus [on which grounds] and, thus, changed the qualified and conditional tone of the original into a flat rejection of magic and an outright condemnation of its practitioners. Similarly, in the chapter containing the praise of the ass, to which I shall return later in some detail, Turquet omits a passage referring to the second-century author Apuleius and his Metamorphoses (or The Golden Ass). In this novel, the main character, Lucius, is metamorphosed into an ass before his initiation into the mysteries of Isis. Apuleius (whose name can be found in some indices of forbidden books) was further supposed to be the author of the Hermetic dialogue Asclepius, and we may suppose that Turquet’s suppression of reference to him here is chiefly motivated by Christianity’s negative attitude toward magic and the Hermetic tradition in general.

There are also instances of the translator’s intervention in some of the numerous passages in which Agrippa had mentioned Holy Scripture or had referred to a specific Biblical passage. It seems likely that Turquet considered the use of the Bible to be too liberal for the context in question. In the chapter on grammar, Agrippa had discussed the fate of
Saul, the first king of Israel, rejected by God for disobeying the divine command to destroy utterly the Amalekites. In Agrippa’s interpretation, Saul had misunderstood God’s meaning, taking the word translated in the Vulgate as “memoria(m)” [memory] for “mares” [males]. Turquet translates this passage in full but adds a marginal note rejecting the pertinence of Agrippa’s remark and, at the same time, denying altogether his integrity as a scholar (A, fol. BviV; T, p. 22): “Ce passage est mal à propos amené par Agrippa en ce lieu, comme il est coutumier de corrompre les passages de tous auteurs, & les faire servir à son propos” [This passage has no bearing on the topic discussed here by Agrippa, just as he habitually corrupts passages in all the authors, and makes them subservient to his own purposes]. This negative appraisal of Agrippa serves to confirm his reputation as a charlatan and echoes the judgment of such writers as Tahureau and Thevet.

Elsewhere, in a passage on the lack of good morals at court, Agrippa had written, paraphrasing Scripture: “vix maritis ipsis vxorum meretricatus curae est, modo vt ait Abraham ad Saram, bene sit illis propter illas, uiantque laute ob gratiam illarum” [Even husbands do not care whether their wives fornicate, provided, as Abraham says to Sara, they are doing well thanks to their behavior and are living in prosperity on account of their credit] (A, fol. PijV). Here, Turquet has erased the identification of the quotation as a Biblical one (T, p. 329). Elsewhere, in the chapter on the Word of God, Agrippa had argued that to know the Bible is not only of importance to theologians but also that it “(pertinere) ad omnem hominem, siue vir, siue mulier, siue senex, siue iuuenis, siue puer, siue indigena, siue aduena, siue proselytus . . .” (A, fol. ZvijV) [concerns every one, whether male, female, old, young, child, native, foreign, or a convert (proselyte)]. Here, Turquet mentions only men (“l’homme”), women (“la femme”), old people (“les vieils”), adolescents and children (“les iuunes & enfans”), and native or foreign peoples (“estrangers, ou naturels”; T, p. 533). He omitted “converts,” thus evading
the need to introduce the theological controversy as to whether non-Christians are allowed to study Scripture. Such manipulations of Agrippa’s use of the Biblical references reveal a certain degree of circumspection. In order to make his work function as a vehicle for little more than entertainment, Turquet no doubt felt that passages which could be taken as contemptuous of Scripture or which left room for theological argument must be rendered uncontrovertially. Excision, adaptation, and marginal annotations are the means to that end.

The same principles are operative when Turquet makes some important modifications to the chapter containing the praise of the ass (“Ad encomium asini digressio”), a text that was one of Agrippa’s most challenging and controversial writings. It contains the principal theological idea expounded in the Declamatio, setting out to justify Agrippa’s reference in the preceding chapter to the Apostles and all the true followers of Christ as asses. It argues that the ass is not only a useful animal but also, in the Hebraic tradition, the symbol of strength, patience, and clemency and, thus, according to Scripture, is held in great esteem by God. This praise also echoes the Hermetic tradition, in which the ass symbolizes the inspired ignorant. In one passage in particular, Agrippa apostrophized his intellectual peers and urged them to become like asses, that is, to practice Christian purity and simplicity (A, fol. Aiiij). Turquet does not translate the personal pronoun “vos” that occurred twice in this passage and, thus, omits the author’s direct call for spiritual and intellectual humility (T, pp. 541–42). In the margin at the head of the chapter, the reader is advised that the Latin text is not rendered in its literal form, because it is blasphemous: “Ce chap. est quelque peu different du Latin, parce que l’auteur se iouë trop irreverement de l’escriture: partant a esté aucunement addouci par le traducteur” (T, p. 540) [This chapter is somewhat different from the Latin, because the author too irreverently makes fun of Scripture. Therefore it has been slightly softened by the translator]. This note refers to
The French Translation of Agrippa Von Nettesheim

the following passage, entirely omitted by Turquet (the omission is indicated by a separate marginal note27): 

Hunc [sc. asinum] (quae constans fama est), Christus suae natiuitatis testem esse voluit, in hoc a manibus Herodis saluari voluit, atque ipse asinus etiam contactu corporis Christi consecratus est, crucisque signaculo insignitus: nam Christus ipse pro redemptione humani generis triumphaturus ascendens in Hierusalem, testibus evangelistis, hunc vectorem conscendit, sicut id magno mysterio per Zachariae oraculum praedictum fuit: et ipse electorum pater Abraham asinis tantum equitasse legitur. (A, fol. Aiijv–Aiiij1)

[There is unanimous consent that Christ chose an ass to be witness to his birth, that He chose to be saved from Herod’s hands sitting on an ass, and even that the ass is consecrated by the touch of Christ’s body and marked by the sign of the cross. For as the evangelists testify, Christ himself, when he entered Jerusalem in order to triumph on behalf of the redemption of humanity, mounted on an ass to carry him, following the prophecy of Zachary foretold in great mystery. And we read that Abraham himself, the father of the chosen people, used to ride only an ass.]

Agrippa also refered to the prophet Balaam’s ass, which saved its master from an angel (Num. 22), and claimed that this ass was gifted with a prophetic spirit, stressing the fact that it spoke in human language (A, fol. AiiijV). Turquet omits both of these observations from his translation (T, p. 543).

Finally, Turquet omits a passage containing a legendary episode from the life of Saint Germain, a fifth-century bishop who died a martyr and whose relics were an object of veneration in France.28 Agrippa had related that Saint Germain once called back to life an ass (A, fol. AiiijV–AvV). According to Agrippa, this episode constituted proof that the ass participates in life after death. It seems reasonable to surmise that

321
this unorthodox claim was sufficient to merit suppression of the passage in Turquet’s eyes.

It will be apparent from the preceding discussion of changes in language and content that Turquet’s translation must be appreciated independently of its original. We can group our conclusions around two focal points. First, the translator has clearly left his mark on the text. Indeed, not only has Turquet translated in a flexible manner in order to produce an agreeable text for his French readership, he has also allowed himself to make changes of substance. It seems safe to ascribe these to Turquet’s political and religious feelings. We have also seen that he has left his personal mark on the text, in the form of marginal notes in which he usually gives a negative appraisal of Agrippa’s scholarship, thus underscoring the latter’s contemporary reputation as an impostor. Second, Turquet’s consideration of the prospective readership has resulted in a number of modifications. It is clear that he has aimed to produce a stylistically fluent translation, to be enjoyed by the general reader, rather than a verbum pro verbo translation that scientifically reproduces Agrippa’s words. Various textual changes suggest that he did not entertain any extensive scholarly expectations of his readers. Additionally, a number of passages show that Turquet has taken into consideration the favorable attitude toward the monarchy that might be expected of his prospective readership. Turquet also eliminates or changes a number of passages that could give rise to problems of orthodoxy, passages that he doubtless judged to be unsuitable for an entertaining work destined for a general public not trained to deal with theological niceties.

Turquet’s translation redefines the function of Agrippa’s text. What was a declamatio has become a paradox, and the consequences of this shift of rhetorical focus are important for our assessment of the relationship between source and target texts. In spite of its condemnation by the
The French Translation of Agrippa Von Nettesheim

Theologians and his subsequent alienation from his patron, the Emperor, Agrippa never disavowed the *Declamatio* or dismissed it as a literary trifle. In his *Apologia*, written in response to the charges of the Louvain theologians, Agrippa first pointed out that they had failed to understand the fundamental thesis set forth in the *Declamatio*. He explained that what he had sought to argue was that reliable and true knowledge belongs to the realm of theology and is to be found in Scripture: he denied in so many words that his book contains a flat rejection of human knowledge.\(^{29}\) He went on to explain that he saw the genre of the *declaratio* as a rhetorical text presenting arguments in a disputatious and polemical fashion. He thus pointed out that the positions the theologians had found offensive should not have been condemned as scientific pronouncements, but ought to have been refuted in a countering declamation ("declaraturus partem diuersam"), as invalid arguments in support of the main thesis.\(^{30}\) In a letter to his friend and protector Lorenzo Campeggio, Agrippa clearly repeated his desire that his opponents challenge his work in open debate, either in the form of a rhetorical text or a public disputation.\(^{31}\) The French translation, in contrast, places Agrippa's *Declamatio* in a wholly different hermeneutic context. In this version, published some fifty years after the original, the status of a text that brings refined critical discussion and rhetorical reasoning to the religious and political issues of its day is degraded to that of a literary trifle on a conventional theme, intended to do little more than amuse the reader. Literary play and ostentation take the place of disputation and polemic. Turquet's French text serves to confirm in a fairly trivial manner the commonly held social opinion that arts and sciences do, in fact, lead to sure knowledge and do have real worth. Further research is needed to establish whether the paradox of the worthlessness of the arts and sciences was, indeed, a topic discussed in the circles mentioned on the title page and whether Agrippa's work played a part in that debate; the numerous reprints of Turquet's translation.
between 1582 and 1630 would certainly justify such a study.

We should also remember that the genre of the paradox, to which Agrippa’s *Declamatio* is assigned in its French version, does, in fact, allow for a satirical function. Since Turquet chose to work from an unexpunged version of the *Declamatio* (that is, a version containing passages criticizing the Catholic Church) and then omitted the passages containing criticism of the Protestants, it is certainly possible that he meant to have his readers believe he was translating a satire against Catholic society. But even if this is so, it still remains to be shown that the translation was actually taken in this manner by the non-learned French reading public, which was surely overwhelmingly Catholic. In this context, we need further research not only into the public reaction to Turquet’s translation but also, more generally, into the function of the sixteenth-century paradox as a vehicle of satire.

It must be emphasized, however, that Turquet did not share Agrippa’s outlook, even if it was one of Agrippa’s intentions to write critically about Christian society and the Roman Church. Unlike his translator, Agrippa never joined the Protestant Reformation, and the criticism directed by him and by many other humanists of his generation against Church and politics was ultimately intended to restore the unity of Christendom rather than promote the schism resulting from the actions of Martin Luther. In the hands of its French translator, the *Declamation on the Uncertainty and Worthlessness of the Sciences and the Arts* surely became a very different composition.
Notes

1. There is no modern bibliography of the works of Agrippa. The translations are listed in Christoph Gottlieb Von Murr, “Conspectus omnium editionum operum Henrici Cornelli Agrippae ab Nettesheym,” Neues Journal zur Litteratur und Kunstgeschichte, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1798), pp. 73–76.

2. *Apologia aduersus calumnias propter Declamationem de Vanitate scientiarum, & excellendia uerbi Dei, sibi per aliquos Louanienses Theologistas intentatas . . .* [Justificatory Response to the Calumnies Concerning the Declamation on the Worthlessness of the Sciences, and the Excellence of the Word of God, Undertaken by Certain Louvain Theologians . . .] (s.l. 1533). The second work, which will not be discussed here was entitled *Quaerela super calumnias, ob eandem Declamationem, sibi per aliquos sceleratissimos sycopantas, apud Caesaream Maiestatem nefarie ac proditorie illata*, and published in the same volume as the Apologia.

3. The *Declamatio* appeared on both the 1531 and 1544 indices issued by the University of Paris, on the 1546, 1550, and 1558 indices issued by the University of Louvain, and on the 1551 and 1559 indices of the Spanish Inquisition; see Index de l’université de Paris 1544, 1545, 1547, 1549, 1551, 1556, in J. M. De Bujanda et al., eds., Index des livres interdits, vol. 1 (Sherbrooke: Centre d’Etudes de la Renaissance, Editions de l’Université de Sherbrooke; Geneva: Droz, 1985), pp. 88, 124; Index de l’université de Louvain 1546, 1550, 1558, in vol. 2 (1986), p. 131; Index de l’inquisition espagnole 1551, 1554, 1559, in vol. 5 (1984), pp. 258, 365.


Marc van der Poel


9. Biographical data from *Biographie universelle (Michaud) ancienne et moderne*, nouvelle édition, vol. 27 (Paris: chez Madame C. Desplaces and Leipzig: Librairie de F. A. Brockhaus, s.a.; reed: Paris: Delagrave, 1840–1900); Eugène and Emile Haag, eds., *La France protestante*, vol. 7 (Geneva: Slatkine, 1966); and Alex. Desplanque, *Mézières en Brenne et la famille Turquet de MAYERNE. ETUDE HISTORIQUE* (Paris, 1864), p. 29, n. 1. The date of Turquet’s registration as “habitant” in Geneva is recorded in Paul Frédéric Geisendorf, *Livre des habitants de Genève, 1572—1574 et 1585—1587*, vol. 2 (Geneva: Droz, 1963), p. 76. The approximate date of his return to France is deduced from his *Epistre au Roy. Présentée à sa Majesté au mois d’octobre 1591* (Tours, 1592); the phrasing of his address to the King in this letter suggests that it was written after Turquet’s return from exile.


326
The French Translation of Agrippa Von Nettesheim


12. Apologie contre les détracteurs des livres de la monarchie aristodémocratique (s.l., 1617).


15. Reference are to the following editions:
A = De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum declamatio inuictiva . . . (Coloniae: M.N. [Melchior Novesianus], 1531); see Index Aureliensis (see above, n. 8), no. 101.840; copy of the Royal Library, The Hague, shelf mark 226 J 21.
T = Declamation sur l’incertitude, vanité et abus des sciences . . . (s.l. [Geneva]: Jean Durand, 1582); see Index Aureliensis, no. 101.902; copy of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, shelf mark H.lit.U.29.

16. Following standard binding techniques, the volume (in 8°) consists of five numbered folios followed by three unnumbered ones: I flag the latter with an asterisk.
Marc van der Poel

17. These are technical terms taken from the specialized vocabulary of scholastic logic: *haecceitas* [the quality of being this, "this-ness"] denotes the relation of individuality, conceived as a positive attribute; *instantia* is a counter argument, showing that a given argument is ineffective.

18. Polymestres (more correctly, Polynnestos) and Sakadas of Argos were two ancient Greek musicians.

19. These are two different kinds of sorcery: "goety" is the invocation of evil spirits; "theurgy" the invocation of beneficent or divine spirits.


21. Elsewhere, however, "Firmianus" (A, fol. Giiijv) is rendered as "Firmien" (T, p. 143).

22. It should be noted that the *paradox*, or paradoxical encomium, is a form of mock eloquence, devoted to the praise of an unworthy or trifling object or to the defence of a thesis that goes against commonly held opinion. As such, it was a highly popular form of writing during the Renaissance; the most famous example is, of course, Erasmus's *Praise of Folly*. See Henry Knight Miller, "The Paradoxical Encomium with Special Reference to its Vogue in England, 1600–1800," *Modern Philology* 53 (1955–56): 145–78; and A. E. Malloch, "The Technique and Function of the Renaissance Paradox," *Studies in Philology* 53 (1956): 191–203.

23. "Dixit autem Dominus ad Mosen, 'Scribe hoc . . . Delebo enim memoriam Amalech sub Caelo'" [The Lord said to Moses, "Record this in writing . . . 'I am resolved to blot out all memory of Amalek from under heaven'"] (Exod. 17: 14). Agrippa notes in his discussion of this matter the fact that the Hebrew word used in the original allows for both meanings.

24. Two other marginal notes confirm Turquet's negative opinion of Agrippa's learning: T, p. 431 (cf. A, fol. Tiiijv), and T, p. 477 (cf. A, fol. Xiiijv–Xv).}

25. The reference is to Genesis, 12: 10–13: "When he (Abram) was approaching Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know very well that you are a beautiful woman, and that
The French Translation of Agrippa Von Nettesheim

when the Egyptians see you they will say, “She is his wife”; then they will kill me but let you live. Tell them that you are my sister, so that all may go well with me because of you and my life may be spared on your account.”


27. “Il se iouë de l’escriture en cest endroit au Latin, qui est obmis” [He makes fun of the Bible in the Latin text, and this is ommitted] T, p. 541.


30. See the revelant passages in *Apologia* . . . , fol. Cviii and Iv.


33. Paola Zambelli has suggested that the popularity of the *Declamatio* could possibly be explained by the fact that it could be used for satirical purposes (“A proposito del De vanitate scientiarum et artium di Cornelio Agrippa,” *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 15 [1960]: 166). A comparision could be made with Henri Estienne’s vast *Apologie pour Hérodote*, a satire of Catholic society published in Geneva in 1566.

34. This study was made possible by a grant from the Dutch Royal Academy of Sciences.

329