John Donne and the Translation of Aristotle’s Politics

into English

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Let me be clear at the outset: I do not think that the Earl of Oxford wrote Shakespeare, nor even that Francis Bacon did, though Shakespeare’s plays are politically astute and Bacon is well enough known to political theorists, and properly enough considered one of our own. The literary mystery I want to pose is not one that had to be invented, but is one that has never been solved, and seems barely even to have been addressed, though it lies in the well-worked field of Elizabethan publication. Who made the first translation of Aristotle’s Politics into English? The edition was published in 1598 by Adam Islip in London, as Aristotes Politiques, or Discourses of Government, and it was translated into English from the French translation published twenty years before by Loys Le Roy, a leading French humanist scholar who also went by the Latin name “Regius.” [1] Included in the English translation are Le Roy’s introduction and his extensive commentary on Aristotle’s text, which for most passages exceeds in length the original text. The name of the translator is not given, but the “Epistle Dedicatoire” is signed with the initials “I.D.” Suggested as the referent, though not positively identified, has been John Dee, sometime lecturer on mathematics and occasional court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth. I think, instead, that the translation was made by the then-young poet and newly hired secretary to the Lord Keeper: John Donne.

If this is right, then new light will be shed both on the critical turn in Donne’s biography – his transition from the Catholic faith in which he was raised to the Protestant Church of England, in which he was later to play an important part – and on the political question of the relation of church and state in England, and perhaps as well the relation of this question to the question of monarchy and republicanism. How influential the translation itself was is not a matter I am in a position to assess. I suppose one would have to look for Aristotelian influences in English politics in the years after 1598, sorting out those that came through scholars who knew the book in Greek, in one or another Latin translation, or even in Le Roy’s French; identifying what was distinctive in Le Roy’s commentary and then sorting out who might have known this through the French, the first edition of which appeared some thirty years before; distinguishing what might have been known of Aristotelian thought through intermediary sources, from Cicero to Aquinas and others still more recent; and probably much more besides. If the present availability of the work is some testimony to its importance – supposing many copies were printed, and knowing at least that many were thought worth saving – then the book must have mattered, for the Folger Library alone
has seven copies. Thomas Hobbes writes in *Leviathan* in 1651 about Aristotle’s errors, as though Aristotle were the reigning authority over politics in England, but he also writes as though the learning of the Greek and Latin languages was the proximate cause of his authority. In the end, however, the task is to determine what Aristotle wrote that also mattered to Elizabethan Englishmen, and more precisely, what they learned from him about the political and constitutional issues of their own day. This is partly a purely historical inquiry, but since the politics and constitutionalism of that era were formative for our own, it matters in a particular way to us whether, how, and to what extent Aristotle might have influenced Anglo-American constitutionalism. And it is interesting in its own right if one of the leading minds in England in an age of keen minds found in Aristotle’s political teaching a guide for one of the thorniest problems in his own predicament.

**IS JOHN DEE “I.D.”?**

Let me start by ruling out the competition, John Dee, suggested by one source. Born in 1527, Dee distinguished himself early in the study of Greek and in mathematics, and was nominated an original fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, upon its foundation in 1546. He studied and traveled in Europe as well, where he befriended the cartographer Gerard Mercator and acquired the latest astronomical instruments. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, his lectures on Euclid at the University of Rheims in 1550 were the first on that author in any university, attracted a large crowd, and won him notice in Paris. Returning to England, he was arrested for a while during the reign of Queen Mary and came to the notice of the future Queen Elizabeth. During the reign of the latter, he turned down several offers of ecclesiastical dignities, but collected an extensive library and remained an occasional consultant to the Queen. His preface to the first English translation of Euclid was often reprinted. He authored several books and wrote an extensive memorandum recommending the reform of the calendar along the lines of Pope Gregory XIII, though his was a Protestant version that claimed to adjust for errors before the Council of Nice, not only after, thus omitting eleven rather than ten days. Though secular officers of the government looked favorably on his proposed reform, the hierarchy in the English Church killed the plan as too Roman, delaying calendar reform for over a century. Dee passed away in 1608.

All of this makes him sound like a plausible candidate to have translated the *Politics*. But Dee early on earned a reputation as a conjurer, and although he claimed this was originally due to some clever machinery he had devised for a performance of Aristophanes’ *Peace*, after 1581 he began an association
with one Edward Kelly, with whom he regularly engaged in occult practices, employing a crystal globe (apparently preserved in the British Museum), conjuring various angels, and performing séances of this sort on the continent for Emperor Rodolph II, King Stephen of Poland, and the emperor of Russia, the first two of whom dismissed Dee and Kelly as imposters, and the last of whom offered them a pension, which was declined. His association with Kelly broke down not too long after the latter convinced Dee in 1587 that the angels commanded that he and Kelly share their wives as a foursome. Together with his adventures with the occult, he maintained an active alchemical practice, seeking the philosopher’s stone and claiming to have turned mercury to gold with a powder from the ruins of an abbey. Returning again to England, he sought a number of offices unsuccessfully from the queen, but was finally made warden of Manchester College in 1595. He remained in Manchester until 1604, and is known to have kept up his conjuring as late as 1607, the year before his death.

On balance, it seems to me altogether implausible that Dee would have translated Aristotle’s *Politics* in the late 1590s. He had the language skills, to be sure, having mastered French and Greek at a young age, and he was a published author of a number of books by 1598, albeit books that appeared with his name on the title-page. But his interest in the occult and in alchemy seems altogether out of sort with the sobriety of Aristotle’s account of political things and Le Roy’s earnest and intelligent effort to explain what Aristotle has to teach the modern world. Moreover, Dee departed from the vicinity of London in the years when the translation must have been produced, and as I read the catalogue of his works in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, he is not known to have published anything during this time, though he did upon his return to the London area in 1604. Indeed, though his interests were often wide-ranging, there is very little he ever wrote that indicates an interest in political things, or even in the related issue of the relation of church and state.
COULD JOHN DONNE BE “I.D.”?

By contrast, John Donne (whose initials in the printer’s idiom of the day would also be “I.D.”), is eligible on the basis of the external evidence. Much is known of Donne’s life – he is the subject of an authoritative 600-page biography by R.C. Bald – though, as might be expected, relatively little can be said with certainty about his early years. Here are the basics.[2] Donne was born in London in the spring of 1572. His father was a tradesman, an ironmonger, and apparently fairly prosperous, with a claim of “gentle birth” through a family named Dwn or Donne in Wales. His mother, nee Elizabeth Heywood, was the daughter of John Heywood and Joan Rastell, the latter of whom was a niece of Sir Thomas More, her mother being his sister. Two of Donne’s maternal uncles, Ellis (or Elias) Heywood and Jasper Heywood, were Jesuit priests, who died in exile, the latter after having spent some time in the Tower of London. His grandfather, John Heywood, fled to Louvain after Elizabeth became queen; John Heywood’s brother Thomas, a monk who apparently remained in England, was executed in 1574 for saying mass. Donne’s father died when he was only four years old. His mother remarried, was widowed again, and remarried again, both times to Catholics, and no one is surprised, given her heritage, that she remained Catholic herself and raised her children in the Catholic faith. (She died in 1631, only a couple months before her famous son, at what must have been near eighty years old.) Donne’s brother Henry, one year his junior, died of fever in prison in 1593 at barely twenty, having been arrested when a priest named William Harrington was arrested in his lodgings. When John Donne wrote in his first known published book, *Pseudo-Martyr*, “I have been ever kept awake in a meditation of martyrdom, by being derived from such a stock and race, as I believe, no family, (which is not of far larger extent, and greater branches,) hath endured and suffered more in their persons and fortunes, for obeying the teachers of Roman doctrine, than it hath done,” it is easy enough to understand what he meant. [3]

But, unlike his mother, Donne did not remain Catholic. No one is quite certain of when he stopped attending Catholic mass (which must only have been occasional anyway, as it was illegal) and began to communicate in the Church of England. He left no account of a dramatic conversion or mystical experience. In late 1597 or early 1598 he became secretary to Sir Thomas Egerton, Lord Keeper (and later Lord Chancellor Ellesmere), and it is supposed that he must have conformed by then, though Bald argues that Egerton was known to be indulgent to those with Catholic pasts. In 1596 and 1597, he joined a couple English military expeditions against Spain, participating in the sack of Cadiz; these argue identification
with Protestant England against Catholic Spain, as the missions were entirely voluntary, and it seems that it was in the course of these that he made the friendships that brought him to Egerton’s attention. Before this he had studied for about four years at Lincoln’s Inn, one of the Inns of Court, though he never took a degree in law. (He took no degree at Oxford, either, which he attended when he was twelve, but that could be explained by his Catholicism: One had to take an oath as a member of the Church at Oxford, but Catholics were sent early, below the age of sixteen when one might validly swear.) Donne’s popularity at Lincoln’s Inn is evidenced by his election as Master of Revels once or twice, and he later wrote that from the study of law he “was diverted by the worst voluptuousness, which is an hydroptic immoderate desire of humane learning and languages.” [4] This seems to be the time of his early poetry, which was shared among his friends, though scholars have dated very few of his poems with perfect certainty. His first biographer, Izaak Walton, writes that at Lincoln’s Inn, Donne,

Being then unresolv’d what Religion to adhere to,…did therefore…to rectify all scruples…presently lay aside all study of the Law: and, of all other Sciences that might give him a denomination; and begin seriously to survey, and consider the Body of Divinity, as it was then controverted betwixt the Reformed and the Roman Church. …Being to undertake this search, he believed the Cardinal Bellarmine to be the best defender of the Roman cause, and therefore betook himself to the examination of his Reasons. [5]

Walton mentions that Donne showed his annotated copy of Bellarmine’s writings to a clergyman, whom Bald identifies as Antony Rudd; Bald suggests Rudd was asked to interrogate Donne, perhaps around the time of his brother’s imprisonment, and concludes that Donne passed safely through this inquisition: “He must have been able to persuade Rudd that his attitude towards Bellarmine was by no means uncritical, and that he was far from being an unyielding Catholic.” By contrast, Bald is quite certain that when Donne first arrived at Thavies Inn in 1591, before transferring to Lincoln’s, he “was not only a Catholic, influenced and guided by Catholic tutors, but also in contact with the most active Catholic proselytizers in England”:

Henry Garnet, later executed for his role in the Gunpowder Plot, and the poet Robert Southwell, author of a petition that year to the Queen, seeking toleration for his fellow Catholics. [6]

In the preface to Pseudo-Martyr, published in 1610, Donne described his conversion, or rather his progress on the matter of faith, as follows:
They who have descended so low, as to take knowledge of me, and to admit me into their consideration, know well that I used no inordinate haste, nor precipitation in binding my conscience to any local religion. I had a longer work to do than many other men; for I was first to blot out, certain impressions of the Roman religion, and to wrestle both against the examples and against the reasons, by which some hold was taken; and some anticipations early laid upon my conscience, both by persons who by nature had a power and superiority over my will, and others who by their learning and good life, seemed to me justly to claim an interest for the guiding, and rectifying of mine understanding in these matters. And although I apprehended well enough, that this resolution not only retarded my fortune, but also bred some scandal, and endangered my spiritual reputation, by laying me open to many misinterpretations; yet all these respects did not transport me to any violent and sudden determination, till I had, to the measure of my poor wit and judgment, surveyed and digested the whole body of Divinity, controverted between ours and the Roman Church. In which search and disquisition, that God, which awakened me then, and hath never forsaken me in that industry, as he is the Author of that purpose, so is he a witness of this protestation; that I behaved myself, and proceeded therein, with humility, and diffidence in myself; and by that, which by his grace, I took to be the ordinary means, which is frequent prayer, and equal and indifferent affections. [7]

While there is no clear reference to dates in this passage, it seems to corroborate (and, given the language, maybe to have served as a source for) Walton’s account. It certainly displays the equanimity that Donne was always to evince on Protestant-Catholic theological debates. In a letter to his friend Sir Henry Goodyer, supposed to have been written about the same time as Pseudo-Martyr, Donne writes about Catholicism and Protestantism with more poetic color:

I will not, nor need to you, compare the religions. The channels of God’s mercies run through both fields; and they are sister teats of His graces, yet both diseased and infected, but not both alike. And I think that, as Copernicus in the mathematics hath carried earth farther up from the stupid center; and yet not honored it, nor advantaged it, because for the necessity of appearances, it hath carried heaven so much higher from it; so the Roman profession seems to exhale and refine our wills from earthly drugs and lees, more than the Reformed, and so seems to bring us nearer heaven; but then that carries heaven farther from us, by making it pass so many courts and offices
of saints in this life, in all our petitions, and lying in painful prison in the next during the pleasure, not of Him to whom we go, and who must be our Judge, but of them from whom we come, who know not our case. [8]

As for whether theological controversy entrapped Donne’s attention during his law school years, one ought to remember the poems, which are startlingly sensual and invariably fresh; or maybe one ought to recall that for Donne throughout his life the sexual and the divine were never distant planets. Bald sums up Donne’s time at Lincoln’s Inn as follows:

He sought pleasure in study, in the theatre, and in friendship; he made the discovery first of sex, and then of love. The truth is rather that life was calling him from all sides. No experience seemed alien to him, and the complexity of human life was fascinating enough for him to linger over it for a time with little thought of the future. [9]

The reference to his thoughtlessness of the future is to Donne’s own account in the letter on the voluptuousness of humane learning quoted above, where Donne says he even then realized that “men of wit and delightful conversation [are] but as moles for ornament, except they be so incorporated into the body of the world that they contribute something to the sustenance of the whole,” which, as one who lacked “great fortune” and thus “needed an occupation,” he might have had by the law. [10] When he wrote these words in 1608, his life had indeed taken a dramatic turn that made reflection on the need for occupation and a place in the world a matter of some urgency. As a result of his secret marriage to Ann More, daughter of Sir George More, a leading member of the court whose high station made a man of modest fortune like Donne unsuitable by the standards of the time as her husband, Donne had been dismissed from his post with Egerton and forced to live on a small pension at a home in the country with his ever-growing family. In fact, it was the publication of *Pseudo-Martyr*, dedicated to King James and defending his requirement of an oath of allegiance, that brought Donne back to favor with the court, gained him an honorary degree at Oxford, and set in motion the process that would eventually result in his taking orders in the Church of England and becoming Dean of St. Paul’s in London and perhaps the greatest preacher of his generation.

How then do these biographical considerations bear on the question of Donne’s possible translatorship? To modern scholarship, I suspect they seem less than compelling. Although it is known that Donne wrote a few political essays [11], and while his posthumously published essay on suicide, *Biathanatos*, has for obvious reasons begun again to draw scholarly attention, Donne is known to scholars
principally for his poetry and for his sermons, and the poetry seems hardly political at all. But it seems to me that one cannot rule out the possibility that Donne’s conforming to the Church of England resulted from deep reflection that ought properly to be called theological-political. The argument of Pseudo-Martyr, after all, is that martyrdom is suicidal if not attentive to the fullness of the circumstances in which a life is risked and sacrificed; in particular, the witness of a Thomas More at the moment of the rupture of Christendom is not repeated in the context of all-pervasive religious warfare and alternating martyrdoms on both sides. The taking of the oath to James in the early 1600s, in other words, where recusancy threatens social coherence, is not the same as More’s refusal to swear an oath to a monarch who sought to break away from the ancient faith. That such immersion in the circumstances of action is needed to judge their morality is no surprise to a student of Aristotelian prudence. What Le Roy points out in his introduction about the possibility of using Aristotle’s Politics to understand political questions in terms not overwhelmed by theological controversy seems, in short, to apply as well to the situation Donne’s generation of Catholics faced in England. After all, those in France who sought to settle the question of succession to the throne apart from the question of the faith of the monarch – the question of the day since Henri III, Le Roy’s dedicatee, was childless and his presumptive heir, Henri de Navarre, was a Protestant – were dubbed “les politiques,” which of course was also the name of Aristotle’s book.

THE PREFATORY LETTERS

A full account of the translation of the Politics into English must pay attention to the translation of Aristotle’s text itself – not to mention would have to try the various statistical techniques now available to determine authorship – and in this all-too-preliminary analysis I have time for neither. I would indicate to the reader, however, one particularly suggestive word: the use of the term “company” to translate the Greek “koinonia.” This comes from the French, “compagnie,” and has as a happy consequence the signal that the true city is based upon a kind of friendship – think of the English word “companion” or the French “copain.” It also should remind us that the founding of Virginia – by the Virginia Company – was not a mere business enterprise but a project of political ambition, with deep roots in the Elizabethan mind.

Still, a word is due about the English translator’s prefatory materials, which I include as appendices to this short essay. There are two: an Epistle Dedicatory and an Epistle to the Reader. (They are followed by translations of Le Roy’s analogous materials: the dedication to Henri III, King of France
and Poland, and a nineteen-page introduction “Of Government and of the Most Renowned Lawmakers that have put it in profe, and of the most famous Authours that have written thereof, specially of Plato and Aristotle, together with a summe and comparison of their Common-wealths.”) Actually there is a third, a Latin poem, “Interpres ad Lectorem.” In both of the translator’s letters, there is evident sharpness of intelligence, power of expression, and political sense. The dedication is to Sir Robert Sidney, brother of the late poet (and an unpublished but prolific poet himself), then governor of the town of Flushing on the continent and subsequent patron of the arts. The theme is the compatibility of learning and arms, surely a matter of some moment to Donne, who would at the time have just returned from armed adventure.

Curiously, Donne’s path and Sidney’s cross later in their lives: they both accompany Lord Doncaster on an embassy to Germany in 1619 seeking to avert what would become the Thirty Years’ War. There is no record that Donne would have known Sir Philip Sidney, though he might certainly have admired him.

Donne’s good friend, Sir Henry Goodyer, addressee of many of his surviving letters, had an uncle by the same name who was Sir Philip’s friend and companion, and was with him at his death of a battlefield wound. And the Sidneys’ sister, Mary Herbert, herself a poet, married into a family with branches deeply intertwined with Donne’s life. In all this, of course, there is no proof of Donne’s authorship. But it would be fitting for Donne to dedicate his translation of the Politics to such a one as Sir Robert, and altogether in character for him to include, as the translator does, a tribute to the late poet as “the true knight of Minerva.”

The letter to the reader is more subtle, emphasizing the dispositions of the readers – on the one hand, some with “courtesy” to overlook faults that learning would expose, others (indeed more) with “discourtesy” to impute faults where none exist. He pleads as well the difficulty of translation, at least for the honest translator who does not allow himself “full liberty of invention,” mentions discreetly the obscurities of the original commentator (Le Roy), and indicates his familiarity with Greek and Latin as well as French and of course English, something that Donne – but hardly every educated man of the era – is known to have had. Finally there is mention by the translator of his “former toys,” which he fears “have displeased” and indicate his “time misspent,” enough of a commonplace among authors of the period, I imagine, but also a characteristic sentiment of a burgeoning poet like Donne.

There remains, then, much to do to substantiate my claim – indeed, it is to strong to call it a claim rather than a mere hypothesis. Nevertheless, there is much in the biographical record to make it plausible
and nothing I know to make it impossible or even highly unlikely. After all, how Donne spent his time when not at sea in 1596 and 1597 is unknown, though the missions of the latter year suffered numerous mishaps and barely left port. More importantly, attention to the translation of Aristotle’s Politics into English is an important project in itself, for it is surely part of the story of the coming of republicanism to the English, or at least of an understanding of a mixed constitution and political change that would prove central to the English constitutional experience of the next two hundred years and beyond. That someone trained in the law but interested in humanistic learning would look to Aristotle’s Politics, particularly someone seeking – like the original humanist translator Le Roy – a third way between the parties to the wars of religion between Protestant and Catholic, and particularly a person of poetical sensibility who could be sensitive to the layers of language in the whole project and the importance of language in political debate and political settlement, seems to me eminently plausible and of historic moment not yet entirely grasped.

NOTES

1. Aristotle Politiqes, or Discourses of Government. Translated out of Greke into French, with Expositions taken out of the best Authours, specially out of Aristotle himself; and out of Plato, conferred together where occasion of matter treated of by them both doth offer itselfe… By Loys Le Roy, called Regius. Translated out of French into English. At London printed by Adam Islip. Anno Dom: 1598. (STC 860) Le Roy’s first edition was published in 1568, dedicated to Henri duc d’Anjou et de Bourbon, brother of King Charles IX of France: Les Politiques d’Aristote, esquelles est monstree la science de gouverner le genre humain en toutes espee d’estats publics; traduictes de grec en francois…. A Paris: Par Michel de Vascosan, Imprimeur, 1568. A revised version, omitting some material (in particular a short treatise before Book V) and rewriting the introduction, was published under the same title by the same publisher in 1576, now dedicated to Henri III, who had acceded to the throne of France after his brother’s death. Le Roy himself died the following year. The English translation was made from this second edition.


3. John Donne, Pseudo-Martyr. Wherein out of certaine Propositions and Gradations, This Conclusion is evicted. That those which are of the Romane Religion in this Kingdome, may and ought to take the Oath of Allegiance. London, Printed by W. Stansby for Walter Burre. 1610. [Delmar, NY: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1974], Advertisement to the Reader, p. [1].


5. Quoted in Bald, John Donne, p. 68.

6. Ibid., pp. 70, 63.


9. Bald, John Donne, p. 79.


11. The only systematic attention I know of to Donne’s political thought is an essay by Johann P. Sommerville, “John Donne the Controversialist: The Poet as Political Thinker,” in David
Colclough, ed., *John Donne’s Professional Lives* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003); there is also an unpublished essay by historian of political thought David Wootton, “Donne’s Religion of Love,” though it points decidedly away from the political.


**APPENDIX ONE**

To the Right Noble and Renowed Gentleman, Sir Robert Sidney Knight, Lord Governovr of the Cavtionarie Towne of Vlissing and Castle of Ramakins:

Sith that most barbarous and Gothish opinion (right noble Sir) of the contrarietie of Learning and Armes, and the impossibilitie of their concurring in the same person to any perfection, is largely confuted by the many examples of those worthie Grecians and Romans who did not only flourish in both, but did therefore far excel all others in martiall glory, because they had sacrificed vnto the Muses: I hope there is none so grossly ignorant, or so peruersely enuious, that will condemne my want of iudgement for chusing a patrone whose profession may seeme contrarie to the nature of this subiect: in which hope I am the more confirmed, because sundrie of your Lordships publike emploiments, besides your priuat studies, doe amplie witnesse, that as your noble brother (the true knight of *Minerua*) hath to his eternal honor augmented the number of those few who in this last age of the declining and degenerating world, haue hounorably emulated those auncient Worthies: so your selfe treading the same path of Vertue, haue by like desert purchased to your name & house, a second eternitie.

And as I doubt not that all indifferent persons wil forbear vnfriendly carping, so likewise when I consider either the subiect, or the first and chiefest author thereof, I presume of your Lordships acceptance. For what more excellent matter or more worthy of a Philosophers penne can be treated of, then that which is the bond of humane society, and the perfector of our reasons vse, which while men wanted they seemed not men, because vwholly resembling beasts? Or what Philosopher can in depth of knowledge equall *Aristotle*, vvhose workes may be justly tearmd, *The Treasurie of humane wisdome*? all which as they fauour of diuinenesse, so amongst them all, these his Discourses of Gouernment haue not the meanest relish thereof; especially vwhere hee handleth the changes and destructions of euery Commonweale, vwith their causes, and sets downe seuerall precepts for the vpholding and preseruing of each: vwhich vvhosoever doth advisedly read, can doe no other than say of him as *Cornelius Nepos* in the life of *Atticus* dooth say of *Tully, Prudentiam esse quodammodo divinationem*: for what he so many years since did vwrite, hath bene in all points exactly verified by Examples of following times, descending even to our present age. I vvill
therefore referre the further consideration of his generall worth and this particular vvorke, vnto your
Lordships wisedome, humbly suing that if his French attire become him better than his English fashion,
wherein my penne hath for the most part suted, you will vouchsafe the hardnesse of the stile for the
harhsnesse of the matter, and deigne to shadow the disgraces of my defects by the grace of your protection:
in which desire and hope I stay my pen, beseeching the Almighty to multiplie in you all earthly and
heauenly blessings.

Your Lordships most humble at commaund,
I.D.

APPENDIX TWO

To the courteous Reader.

Lvcilius (gentle Reader) was woont to wish that his Writings might escape the sight and censure both of the
Learnedst, & of the most vnlearned; least the one seeing too much should discouer some defects, & the
other vnderstanding nothing, or very little, condemne all. But as in evey other thing wishes doe but argue
want, and yeeed no warrant for the accomplishing of mens desires: so in this especially, because the
fortune of Bookes publisht resembleth that of Ships at Sea, the one subject to all sorts of Readers as the
other to all kinds of Weather. By the sorts of Readers I meane not only as Lvcilius did, who distinguisht
them by learning, ignorance, and meane knowledge; but there is yet a farther difference no lesse to be
respected: for oft where Learning discouers faults, Courtesie dooth shadow them: but far more oft where no
faults are, discouersties (I use too gentle a tearme) dooth impute them: so mightily are the most mens minds
infected with the bitter humour of Zoilisme, a thing not greatly to be mureueld, sith that which is easiest is
still most vsuall. It were folly in mee to wish with Lvcilius for things impossible, and meere madnesse to
hope for them. It shall suffise briefly to acquaint you with some thinges which being absolutely considered
and the truth thereof vnknown, may seeme to yeeld large and iust occasion of reprooфе: as first, the
harshnesse of the phrase and rough conueiance of the stile, which if any doth dislike, as doubtlesse some
will, I entreat them to remember (for I can hardly thinke they know not) that no translation is capable of
Elegance as the originall, because the one hath full libertie of inuention, & the other is by necessity tied to
observention: next I desire them to consider Aristotles maner of writing, the obscurite, compacting and
vnsuall composing of his stile, which if they weigh vprightly, they needs must graunt that though. Tullies
honourable Encomium which he doth generally give it, calling it Aureum flumen orationis, be in respecte
of the puritie thereof, and of the excellencie of the matter most true, yet that they cannot with any reason looke for a fluent and flourishing stile in the translation of such a subiect, either out of the originall or any other language whereinto it hath ben since translated. I wish them farther to consider that manie places of the Comment (wherein are set downe whole discourses touching Astrologie, Cosmographie, and other deepe points of the mathematicall sciences, lightly touched by Aristotle) are more obscure than the text it selfe. Touching the diuersitie that may be found in the translation, it is not to be meruelled at, sith some part of the booke was performed by another, before I vndertooke the rest. But I hope, that though wee differ in the manner, yet that we swarue not from the truth of the matter, howsoever the Compositors mistaking hath therein somewhat wronged vs, and the oft & thick enterlining of the copie, hastily written, deceuied him; but the cheefest of those ouersights are noted in the end. As for the difference of the English in some places from the French, I answere, that when vpon any obscuritie I resorted to the Greek, and found the rendering therof in French not so significant as might be, I haue been bold to follow the originall, vnlesse it did so depend on the Comment, that I could not alter it. And touching the difference of it from the Latin, I hope none will accuse mee for not following that whereeto I was not bound, and besides if they conferre the Latine with the French, and both with the Greeke, they shall (I doubt not) find that the French doth approch farre neerer to Aristotle. Lastly, touching the extraordinarie harshnesse that may in some places be found, I say thus much only, that the difficulty of the thing, wherein euen learned men themselues haue sometimes faild, with the small time and leisure which I had both to doe and reuiew it may suffise if not to excuse me, yet at least to purchase pardon. But sith my present hast allowes mee not sufficient time to touch every particular, I will commit vnto your courtesies the further consideration both of this & whatsoeuer els may be obiected, humbly entreating you to measure my labour not by it selfe, for it is worthlesse, but by my good will and earnest desire to please, which is therefore the greater, because I feare that my former toies haue displeasd, which were they againe to pen and publish, should rather sleepe in silence, than I through them be acused of time misspent.

APPENDIX THREE

Interpres ad Lectorem.

Est sua laus illis qui summa per otia scribunt:
Oitia amant Musae, nec inani Fabula sensu
Virgineo semota choro sacravit amoena:
Oitia amant artes, nec frustra Pallas olivam
(Sit licet armipotens) pacis tutatur amore,
Pacis amore dedit, celebri certamine victrix.
At necque turbati transmittunt lumina fonts,
Nec restant mediis Typhi sua iura procellis,
Sit sua laus illis qui summa per otia scribunt;
Sit venia & nobis queis sors nulla otia praestat.