
Machiavelli's *Belfagor* and the *Dutch Mirror of Evil Women*

By Francesca Terrenato (Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy)

Abstract & Keywords

English:

Machiavelli's *Belfagor* (written in the 1520's and first published in 1549), a satirical tale about the devil who takes a bride, enjoyed a circulation of its own in the seventeenth-century, independently of the author's political writings. This article deals with the Dutch translation of this novella, by placing it in the context of popular and misogynist literature in the Early Modern period, as well as in the context of Dutch seventeenth-century culture and practices of translation. *Belfagor* combines Florentine folklore with statements about gender, politics and religion. In 1668 it appeared in the Netherlands in a printed miscellany, the *Spiegel der quade vrouwen* [*Mirror of Evil Women*]. In France and in England, in the context of the debate known as the 'querelle des femmes' or 'battle of the trousers', pamphlets and collections on the theme circulated widely. *Belfagor* fits perfectly within this tradition, also thriving in the Dutch Golden Age. But Machiavelli's tale could also be valued by Dutch readers for its anti-absolutist strain and its polemic against the clergy. These issues were particularly welcome in the Protestant Dutch republic. Furthermore, the translation of Italian prose (Boccaccio and Machiavelli) helped the Dutch literary system to develop its own 'middle style'.

Keywords: Machiavelli, *Belfagor*, early modern translation, popular literature, misogynist literature

Belfagor's wanderings

An early detractor of Machiavelli, cardinal Reginald Pole, wrote in 1539 that the *Prince* had been 'written with the finger of Satan'.^[1] This was to become a common refrain in the often-uninformed criticism against the Florentine secretary, but Machiavelli's 'sympathy for the Devil'^[2] is indeed quite literally expressed in his tale *Belfagor* (first published under his name in 1549).^[3] While the *Prince* travelled all around Europe arousing contrasting feelings this satirical fable about the devil who takes a bride enjoyed an independent circulation of its own. The English translation appeared in 1647 (*The Divell a Married Man*),^[4] followed by one in Dutch in 1668 (*Seer vermaeckelijcke vertelling [...]*, as part of a miscellany)^[5] and the Danish translation was probably also published around the 1660's (*Belphegors Gifftermaal [...]*).^[6] In France the first edition dates back to 1664 (as an appendix to a collection, *Les vies des poetes grecs*) and the second to 1677 (in the volume *L'enfer burlesque. Le mariage de Belphegor*).^[7]

Seventeenth-century European publishers and readers, generally cautious in approaching the *Prince* because of its alleged political opportunism and atheism, could instead freely lay hands on this minor work generally printed on its own or in combination with works by other nonpolitical authors. The French 1664 edition is particularly relevant, since in 1557 Machiavelli's work had been prohibited in its entirety in the papal Index and the ban was usually respected by French printers. The *Prince* and other works circulated in the Protestant countries but stimulated fierce debates, whereas the captivating character of the devil turned into a man, who takes a human wife and goes through hell on Earth, clearly had a wide appeal and roused little or no suspicion. However, it is precisely on some controversial moral and political aspects of the tale as far as its circulation in England is concerned, that Hoenselaars concentrates in his 1998 study.^[8]

At first glance a *divertissement* totally alien to Machiavelli's learned political writing, *Belfagor* can actually be read as an ingenious *bric-a-brac* combining the tradition of the folk tale – a flourishing genre especially in Florence – with the polemical views of the author himself on the politics of his own day. Machiavelli elaborated upon elements derived from oral lore: the devil in disguise interacting with humans, a high-maintenance, petulant wife, a witty peasant who makes it to the royal court. He could also have found inspiration in a French fabliau, just as his Venetian contemporary Giovanni Brevio, who wrote a similar although less provoking tale (see Stoppelli 2007; 2014). The presence of a political thinker in the background, however, is evident in his treatment of the subject.

In the first pages of the tale, Machiavelli depicts a monarch (Pluto, king of Hell) opening a democratic debate with his counselors^[9] in order to decide whether to send a representative to the upper world. *Belfagor* will be sent on Earth to gather information on matters of common interest, that is to say, to acquire evidence of the catastrophic consequences of marriage for men, an element that the scrupulous infernal judges must take into account when disposing of the sinners' souls. Machiavelli presents the reader with an upside-down perspective: justice and participation in the administration of justice are more likely to reside in Hell than on Earth. According to Sumberg, author of an illuminating reading of the tale:

The devil chosen, though unwilling at first, consents to go in a spirit of civic sacrifice typical of a political regime that is broadly based. Machiavelli notes the longstanding political stability of the nether world. In fact he pays more attention to the political arrangements of hell than the logic of the plot requires. Why? Where is good government to be found? In hell. His readers know well enough that it is not found on earth. He wants them to share his joke about the political superiority of the imagined kingdom of hell.

Machiavelli even claims for hell a concern for truth and justice. Assembled for consultation, the devils hold that they would show little love for justice were they to fail to investigate men's complaints. It is this alleged

love of justice that pushes them to seek the truth. Where on earth are truth and justice found?

The storyteller carefully sketches the limited monarchy of hell. (Sumberg 1992: 244)

Limited monarchy is preferable to absolute monarchy, as Machiavelli states in Chapter IX (*De principatu civili*) of his *Prince*, where he praises the stability of a government based on popular consent, and in Chapter 23 when, dealing with the perils of adulation, he praises the ruler who is able to ask for and listen to wise advice. The first pages of the tale are thus a humorous appendix to Machiavelli's more engaged works.

The vicissitudes of Belfagor in Florence as a married man, his pact with the peasant who saves his life and the reiterated possessions of young ladies in the second part of the tale combine elements of the misogynist tradition stemming from the Middle Ages with anti-clerical satire, a mixture present in the tradition of Italian novellas from *Novellino* and *Decameron* to Straparola's *Le piacevoli notti* [The Nights of Pleasure].^[10] It is worth noting, with Ghelli (2007), that Machiavelli purposely presented it as a 'fable', thus underlining its supernatural features in contrast with the reality-based *novella*. Although its beginning and end are located in the demonic underworld, the central part of the text, telling the vicissitudes of married life as well as hinting at the sins of priests and monks, reminds us of antecedents in the corpus of (late) medieval tale collections from Tuscany.

Belfagor in the context of seventeenth century Dutch popular literature

When the Dutch *Belfagor* went to press, Machiavelli was already well known in the thriving, tolerant Dutch Republic. His editorial fortunes had begun there some forty years before: a Dutch translation of the *Prince* had been available since 1615. This fact seems to indicate that it might have been read by a wider public than the learned circles (who could read it in Latin, French or even Italian). Another notable fact is the appearance of various French and Latin editions printed by Dutch presses that deliberately ignored Roman Catholic censorship. Among them was the 1683 French *Prince* by Amelot de la Houssaie printed in Amsterdam, with a famous apologetic foreword. These translations spread direct knowledge of Machiavelli's ideas, promoting a decidedly positive view of his figure, based on his ability to realistically depict the good and bad aspects of power that contrasted with the negative prejudice mostly expressed by the learned (Terrenato 2010: 178-182).

Machiavelli's *Belfagor* came out in the Dutch Republic as the last component of a printed miscellany, the *Spiegel der quade vrouwen*, or *Mirror of Evil Women* (second augmented edition of the work published in 1668, henceforth the *Mirror*). The printing press was that of the brothers Appelaer, who also published seafaring, scientific and theological tracts.^[11] The volume is an example of a *volksboek* [popular reader]. *Volksboek* is an umbrella term for a varied corpus of texts (many of them collections of sparse short prose), intended for the recreation and/or basic education of a wide range of readers. As often happens with this kind of publication, no indication is given of the translator or editor of the collection. The target group of such books is markedly different from that of the learned and/or informed public interested in contemporary political and philosophical debates that read Machiavelli's *Discourses* and the *Prince*. Further guesses at the targeted readers for Machiavelli's fable in this particular collection and its positioning in the literary system have to be contextualized in terms of recent research in the field of popular readers.

With regard to Dutch popular literature, E.K. Grootes has the merit of having laid down some fundamental issues connected to the study of this neglected early modern best-selling kind of text.^[12] Firstly, we must consider the huge variety of publications that it included, from almanacs to books of proverbs, from travelogues to farces, from songbooks to lives of saints, from fables to books on and for women, to mention just a few. Secondly, the study of these texts entails in many cases an inclusive approach towards literary products that until recently had seemed too low and trivial to be included in literary handbooks or be the object of research. Grootes rightly calls for more attention for this 'overgrown backyard', so that scholars may be able 'to paint a white spot in the map of our diachronic and synchronic literary historiography' (Grootes 1982-1983: 11). Furthermore, he considers it impossible to draw a line in this corpus between original and (regularly unacknowledged) translated texts, often juxtaposed in one volume; nor can we limit ourselves, in his view, to tracing back the imported items to their source lest we miss the chance to understand the function and scope of these heterogeneous items.

Their fortune is a transnational phenomenon that sees the circulation, translation and re-use of works (and sometimes of printed illustrations) in new collections, in Italy, France, England, and other European countries. In an article on English readers, for instance, Adam Smyth describes such collections in general terms as follows:

Printed miscellanies were small, octavo or duodecimo publications, the products of a bundling together of writing from diverse sources – manuscript commonplace books, plays, songbooks, other printed miscellanies. These texts are bursting with material: most commonly short poetry from numerous unscrubbed authors, but often also potted histories, court dialogues, model letters, notes of mythology, riddles and jokes. These books are verse miscellanies; models for etiquette; prompt-books for wits; exemplars of elite life. The most common subject for discussion is love, particularly the torturous sufferings of the snubbed male wooer, but poems praising or criticizing women, lauding Royalism, friendship, and drink, are also common. If these books could be said to have any unified voice, that voice must be pitched somewhere among the bawdy, the misogynous, the Royalist, the voyeuristic, and the educative. (Smyth 2004: 4)

Luc Debaene, whose study is focused on the Dutch prose novels of classical or chivalric origin circulating in the seventeenth century, in his effort to outline the group of popular readers addressed by these novels, points to the French tradition of the *livres bleus* (Debaene 1977: 23). The small format, the cheap covers and printing paper, and the presence of illustrations, featured in this heterogeneous corpus of inexpensive booklets published in seventeenth-century France, are consistent with the aforementioned Dutch miscellanies. In discussing the targeted readers Chartier problematizes the notion of 'popular': it is possible that these books 'constituted reading matter for different social groups, each approaching it in ways ranging from basic deciphering of signs to fluent reading' (Chartier 1984: 131).

It is rather interesting to note that a number of tales from Boccaccio's *Decameron* also suffered the same fate as *Belfagor*, ending up in a Dutch collection of diverse texts, known as the *Distance-shortener or the Melancholy-chaser* [*Wech-corter of Melancolie-verdrijver*], that was re-issued several times starting from the last decade of the sixteenth century. As the title, format and quality of print suggest, it was intended as a travel companion for the lower and middle classes; the editor/translator did not eschew bawdy and explicit passages in Boccaccio's tales, as a learned translator of the *Decameron*, such as Dirck Coornhert^[13], had done before.

Similar in structure to other miscellaneous volumes that inundated the European book market at the time, the Dutch *Mirror* is a heterogeneous collection of writings on the faults of women. Anti-uxorial and misogynist attitudes were to be found in a variety of works from all over Europe and represent one of the aspects of continuity from the medieval to the early modern range of literary subjects. Authors often schizophrenically engaged in both satires against women and apologies of the female sex (according to the *laus* and *vituperatio* scheme), as Boccaccio did in two of his works: the learned Latin collection of lives of illustrious women, *De mulieribus claris* (1362) and *Il Corbaccio* (1365), a venomous vernacular invective against the 'imperfect creature excited by a thousand foul passions' (quoted in Panizza 2013: 189).

In her 1966 study of misogyny in literature, Katherine Rogers states about the early modern period:

Although the Renaissance retractions were more secular and generally less virulent, as well as less frequent, than those of the Middle Ages, poets continued to indulge in the medieval charges that women's bodies are really masses of corruption; that women are lustful and indiscriminating; that they offer no more than sensual gratification, which is degrading; and that they are to be used, discarded, and escaped from before they ruin their lovers. (Rogers 1966: 118)

The *Mirror of Evil Women* is perfectly in line with this synchronic *topos*. Notwithstanding the solemn title of '*Spiegel*', winking at the tradition of early modern mirrors of virtue, righteous love or courteous behavior, the volume ending with *Belfagor* is a product intended for average readers in search of solace with just a tiny bit of learning attached. As for the choice of the overall subject, the faults of women, it was quite fashionable at the time in the Netherlands where, as Schama states, there was an 'outpouring of misogynist literature that gathered momentum through the century'. Inspired by an English work from the time of the Pamphlet Wars, Joseph Swetnam's *Arraignment of Lewd and Idle Women* (1615)^[14], books like the *Mirror*, writes Schama, 'scorned the institution of marriage as a trap sprung by unscrupulous females for the enslavement and ruin of gullible males' (Schama: 9). Both in France and in England, in the context of the debate known as 'querelle des femmes' or 'battle of the trousers', pamphlets and collections on the theme circulated widely together with their philogynist counterparts, as shown by Ian Maclean (Maclean 2013).

Besides the *Mirror*, the Netherlands contributed to the dispute with a number of satirical texts against women and warning men against marriage, displaying a variety of choices as far as the genre and targeted audience is concerned. Schama mentions the *Huwlijks Doolhof* [Marriage Maze] of Jan de Mol (1634), the *Tien Vermakelijkheden der Houwelijks* [The Ten Amusements of Marriage] (1678), and the *Biegt der Getrouwde* [The Trap of the Betrothed] (1679), published by Hieronymus Sweerts (Schama: 9).^[15]

Particularly widespread in its circulation (as testified by the presence of the volume in a number of public and private libraries in Europe) is also the Latin tract *Hippolytus Redivivus id est remedium contemnendi sexum muliebrem* (1644). Author, publisher and place of publication are unknown, although bibliographic research locates it in the Netherlands.^[16] Not without a sense of irony (see the fake censorship note in the first pages), it is a learned discussion of the faults of women based on ancient and early Christian *auctoritates* such as Euripides, Seneca, Eusebius and Orosius, full of quotes and marginal annotations. It was translated into the vernacular and popularized in *Den verreesen Hippolytus* (1679),^[17] by adding to the (simplified) original content the translation of Phaedra's letter to Hippolytus from Ovid's *Heroides*, some copper engravings, a satirical 'cooling beverage' in prose for crazy lovers, and a 'story' of uncertain origin depicting the misdeeds of a courtesan. The result is a remarkable combination of highbrow and lowbrow styles and subjects quite similar to those of the *Mirror*.

The *Mirror* included a few international titles. The first part, the *Alphabet*, is a translation of an anonymous French work: *Alphabet de l'imperfection et malice des femmes, dedié à la plus mauvaise du monde*.^[18] Later attributed to an otherwise obscure Jacques Olivier, 'holding a licentiate in Canon Law', the text is in fact attributable to the Franciscan preacher Alexis Troussel, who died in 1632 after writing some religious works (Maclean 2013: 161-162). The title page shows a woman with a pair of chicken legs appearing at the bottom of her lavish dress. The series of short texts starts with *A, Avidissimum Animal, B Bestiale Baratrum, C Concupiscentia Carnis*, and goes on with analogous definitions of the most repelling aspects of women's behavior, enriched by mythological and historical examples borrowed from other works. This book was published in the course of a heated book dispute between French women-haters and their opponents, that saw the publication in the years 1615-1632 of new titles as well as many reprints. The French *querelle* had an English counterpart, which began with the publication of the already mentioned *The arraignment* by Joseph Swetnam in 1615.

As for the tales that precede *Belfagor* in the second edition of the *Mirror*, they have an English source: one of John Reynolds' successful collections of grimy tales, namely *The triumphs of gods revenge against the crying and execrable sinne of (willfull and premeditated) murther*, published in 1635.^[19] This best-selling collection, offering material for numerous tragedies, polemical writings and tales in the following decades, is rarely studied and its source (or sources), if there is one, remains unidentified. The *Mirror* includes only translations of those stories from Reynolds' collection centering on treacherous, murderous women. It has this source in common with a German collection published in 1673 (*Acerra Historico-Tragica Nova [...]*) and with an English collection named *The glory of God's revenge [...]* (1685) by Thomas Wright.

Machiavelli's tale appears only in the second edition as the closing chapter of the series of exemplary tales about criminal women, followed by a small number of farcical short tales [*kluchten*] derived from an unknown source or from the oral tradition. *Belfagor* is given more importance than the previous parts for it has a separate title page where the name of the author, Sir [*de heer*] Machiavelli is mentioned. This is also a hint at a possible separate circulation of the tale in booklet form. No other text in the collection bears an author's name.^[20] 'Machiavelli', instead, surely rang a bell for most readers, even those not directly acquainted with his political writings, thanks to references to him and his 'methods' in Dutch pamphlets and epigrams during the Eighty Years' War (1568-1648), which the Netherlands fought to gain their independence from Spain (Terrenato 2017: 191). The combination of Machiavelli's fable with some unassuming farcical tales is a notable choice on the editor's part. These short texts, endlessly remixing such over-used ingredients as the misbehaving wife and the cuckolded husband, surely offer some solace but no surprise to the reader. He or she would have to wait until the very last pages to find a plot full of unexpected elements, such as a parliament in Hell, a 'poor devil' married to a proud and bossy (although not adulterous) wife, possessions and exorcisms, and a witty peasant. In terms of style, irony and narrative impact, the Dutch *Belfagor* surpasses by far the preceding chapters, due to the merits of the original and of the quite literal but fluent translation.

Belfagor as a model of satirical prose

Biting satire against women offered the anonymous translator/editor the chance to paste together texts from different languages and genres, and *Belfagor* is a gold mine in this respect. The Devil's bride surpasses Lucifer in pride; she is vain, manipulative, ill-tempered, and takes advantage of her husband's feelings; it is quite obvious that with such wives men's life on Earth is worse than Hell.

But Machiavelli's tale offers more in terms of satire. It ridicules learning, the clergy, religion in general. These aspects are purposely intensified by the Dutch translator. For example, a young woman in the tale who is possessed speaks Latin and philosophizes but at the same time also reveals the sins of many people, including those of a monk. The Dutch text underlines especially his carnal lust: '[...] een Monnick, die vier Jaren lang een Vrouw met een Monnickskap bekleed, tot sijn lust in sijn Celle gehouden had; [...]' [A Monk who had kept for his pleasure a woman dressed in a monk's robe in his cell for four years] (Machiavelli 1668: 465). The Roman Rite of the Catholic Church describes exorcism as a sacrament, applied for the first time by Christ himself, and as such a prerogative of the clergy. The peasant Gianmatteo is a mock-exorcist, and all the apparel he uses is sheer parody. But his tricks actually work. The 'finte cerimonie' [fake ceremonies] of the Italian original are rendered as 'versierde belacchelickheden' [embellished nonsense] in the Dutch translation (Machiavelli 1668: 467). In the Protestant Dutch republic anti-clerical satire was particularly welcome. But even more daring on matters of religion, as Sumberg notes, is the view, implicitly underlying the tale, that 'the devil is made flesh, lives among us, suffers tortures on earth and then returns to his point of origin, hell. All too clear is the blasphemous parallelism between the devil-man and the God-man' (Sumberg 1992: 247).

The Dutch translator felt no urge to amend Machiavelli's tale. He closely follows the original: topographical details are maintained, for example, although Dutch readers would have had no idea of the location of the small rural village of Peretola, where the devil meets the sly Gianmatteo who will in the end outwit him. The translator made the interesting choice of translating Gianmatteo's name, which becomes *Jan Tijssen*, a quite familiar-sounding name that may have been intended to encourage Dutch readers to identify with the character. Minor misinterpretations come to light with a close reading: the meaning of 'battiloro' [goldbeater] is obscure to the translator who simply refers to 'goud' [gold]. The meaning of the threatening words of Belfagor is misunderstood and totally reversed in the Dutch translation:

Italian: Dove io ti ho facto bene ti farei per lo advenire male [Whereas I have been good to you, I would be bad to you in the future]

Dutch: Want daer ick u wel gedaen heb, soud ghy in 't toekomende my qualick doen [Whereas I have been good to you, you would be bad to me in the future][21]

These and other divergences with extant translations and adaptations of the tale confirm that the translator worked from the original Italian text, as stated in the title-page. A quite remarkable fact at a time when Italian works often travelled through French translations.

Like elsewhere in Northern Europe, early modern translations contribute in the Dutch-speaking area to the development of new vocabulary: the first written record of the Dutch word *kolonie* (colony), for example, is to be found in the first Dutch translation of Machiavelli's *Prince* (Terrenato 2010: 201). *Belfagor*, however, did not pose any real lexical challenges to the translator but it did present some stylistic difficulties. The combination of the lofty and resonating style of Pluto's speech in the first pages with the sharp, ironic comments of the narrator and with the loose everyday language of the dialogues, demanded some skill on the part of the translator, in most cases with convincing results. The opening lines of the 'oration' held by the infernal King exemplify the translator's ability to handle a long clause chain and a few rhetorical devices in his native language:

Hoe wel dat ick, mijn seer beminde, door Hemelsche schicking, en door het Noodloods geval dat gantsch onherroepelick is, dit Rijck hier besit, en ick derhalven aen generley oordeel, 't zy Hemels of Werelds, verbonden kan zijn, nochtans dewijl 'er meerder kracht van wijs beleyd onder soodanighe te vinden is, die meerder aen de wetten sich kunnen onderwerpen, en meerder het oordeel van andere achten, soo heb ick goet gevonden met u te rade te gaen, hoe dat ick in een geval, 't welck tot eenige oneer van onze heerschappy sou kunnen dienen, my behoorde te schicken: [...] (Machiavelli 1668: 454-455)

[Although I, my most beloved, by virtue of a Celestial arrangement and of an irrevocable Fate, rule this Kingdom, and cannot therefore be subjected to anybody's judgment, be it Celestial or Terrestrial, nevertheless seen that the power of a wise administration is more likely to be found among those who are more willing to submit themselves to the law and who value the opinion of the others, I have consented to hold a council with you on how I should behave in a matter that could damage the reputation of our dominion [...]]

In the last page the translator chose to explain by means of small additions why a simple stratagem such as pretending that Belfagor's wife was coming to fetch him could have made the devil (whose name on Earth is Roderick) flee. The translated text thus bluntly uncovers the hidden purpose of Gianmatteo's theatrical staging, which is in fact revealed with a rather unexpected twist in the original. It can be a sign that the Dutch public was deemed not yet ready to cope with the pungent style that typified the closing lines of traditional Italian novellas:

En dus dese hem wederom biddende, en hy desen gedurich voortsscheldende, oordeelde Ian Tijssen geen tijt meer te moeten verliesen, bedacht hy eyndelick dat hem Roderick geseyt had van sijn quaet Wijf, oordeelde geen beter middel te kunnen bedencken, om hem uyt te doen varen, als hem te seggen, dat sijn Wijf hem quam soecken, en het teecken met sijn hoet gevende, maecken alle die daer toe bestelt waren terstond haer gerucht, en naderden so tot de schouw-plaets met klancken die tot in den Hemel dreunden, van welck geluyt Roderick sijn ooren overvallen gevoelende, en niets daer van wetende, lichtelick verwondert en als heel verbaest, vraeghde hy Ian Tijssen wat sulcks mogt bedieden. Waer op Ian Tijssen als verslagen seyde, Ach! Lieve Roderick, het is u Vrouw die u hier komt soecken. (Machiavelli 1668: 471-472)

[As he kept on imploring, and the other kept on insulting him, Jan Tijssen decided he could not wait any longer, and thinking of what Roderick had lately told him of his wicked wife, he could not find a better way to make him flee than to tell him that his Wife had come to fetch him. Given the sign with his hat, all those who had this task immediately began to play and came towards the stage with such a terrible noise that it reached the Heavens, and Roderick feeling his ears offended by it, not knowing what it was, totally stupefied and

surprised, asked Jan Tijssen what was going on. Jan Tijssen then, apparently upset, answered: ‘Alas, Dear Roderick, your Wife is coming to look for you’.]

The sardonic mode of expression that Machiavelli excelled in could represent a model for prose, in this case for a middle style that combined the formal and the informal register, and in which the clash between high and low produced an ironic effect together with the incidents depicted. From the second half of the sixteenth century the works of such successful authors as Dirck Coornhert, Hendrik Spiegel, Pieter Hooft and Karel van Mander offered models for learned prose in the fields of philosophy, linguistics, historiography and artists’ biography,^[22] which quickly entered the canon. The Dutch *Belfagor* reveals interesting common features with the prose of the playwright Gerbrand Bredero (Jansen 2011: 34-65),^[23] an author who knew how to balance popular amusement with literary adornment. The adoption of hyphenated compounds (e.g. ‘Aerts-duyvel’, [archdevil]) and the alternate use of the genitive case before and after the head noun, noticeable in the Dutch translation and in Bredero’s prose fragments, hint at a preoccupation with language rules that were being discussed at the time (Jansen 2011: 55-57).

Learned translators also provided models for a less engaged kind of narrative writing, often derived from the Italian tradition. Coornhert’s translation of novellas from the *Decameron* (1564) and Van Mander’s adaptation of Vasari’s *Lives* of the Italian painters (1603-4) are a first step towards a full-range development of the potential of prose, notwithstanding the cautious cuts imposed by these authors on their Italian sources, mostly regarding sexual morality and religion. The Dutch *Belfagor*, like many other prose translations from Italian and French at the time, appearing in inexpensive books for a wide audience, had a role in further popularizing prose as a medium, and in endowing narrative with that freedom of thought that paved the way for the production of original novels, often full of libertine and picaresque aspects, in the second half of the seventeenth century in the Netherlands.

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Notes

[1] In the *Apologia Reginaldi Poli ad Carolum V*, 1539, printed only in 1744, in Brescia (quoted in Donaldson 1988: 9). The complete sentence reads: 'Liber enim, etsi hominis nomen, & stylum prae se ferat, tamen, vix coepi legere, quin Satanae digito scriptum agnoscerem' (Pole 1744: 136-137).

[2] I quote here the title of the famous 1968 song by the Rolling Stones, written by Mick Jagger and Keith Richards.

[3] Giunti, Firenze. For details on the different editions and on the attribution of the text see Stoppelli (2007). The edition consulted here is Machiavelli (1971). For a recent overview of the medieval sources of the plot and dating of the work see Stoppelli (2014).

[4] This is actually the first appearance of a translation undoubtedly based on Machiavelli's text, although the author is not mentioned. The translator and printer are anonymous and only the place, London, is known. A version of the tale, probably based on the similar novella by Straparola, although perhaps Machiavelli's fable was also used as a source, came out as early as 1588 in Barnabe Riche, *Riche his Farewell to Militarie Profession* (1581) (Hoenselaars: 109), followed by theatrical adaptations of elements from the tale from around 1600 (see infra n. iv). *Belfagor* was available in Italian, in a collected edition with other works by Machiavelli that was reprinted by Thomas Wolfe in London in 1588. The 1647 anonymous English translation is certainly the source for the short anonymous play *The Devill, and the Parliament* (1648), featuring a strong royalist and anti-parliamentarian stance (Hoenselaars: 116).

[5] The full title reads *Seer vermaeckelicke vertelling, beschreven door de heer Nicolaes Machiavelli, uyt het Italiaens in het Nederlandts vertaelt* [A very entertaining tale, written by Sir N.M., translated from Italian into Dutch]. It closes the volume: *Spiegel der quade vrouwen; daer in al hare gruwelen heel aerdigh worden veroot, soo uyt de H. Schrift en Vaderen, als uyt d'oude en nieuwe Geschied-boecken, door P. B. Minnebroeder [...]*, 't Amsterdam, Broer and Jan Appelaer, 1668 [Mirror of evil women; in which all their harmfulness is depicted in a pleasant way, from the Bible and the Fathers, as well as from old and new history books]. The presence of the Machiavellian tale in this second augmented edition, in fact a miscellany, is announced on the collection's title page.

[6] Machiavelli/ *Den Florentinske SECRETARII/ artige og lystige/ BELFE-/GORS Gifftermaal// Udsæt aff Italiensk paa / Danske/ oc dedicerit til alle/ Onde Qvinder. – Prentet udi dette Aar* [Machiavelli. *The Florentine Secretary's BELPHEGOR'S Righteous and Jocular Marriage. Transposed from Italian into Danish and dedicated to all Bad Women. – Printed this year*]. See Segala in this issue.

[7] The first French translation is contained in Tanneguy Lefevre, *Les vies des poètes grecs*, Paris, Guignard, 1665, under the title *Le mariage de Belfegor*. The second (relying on the first) appeared in an anonymous volume with other satirical texts attributed to Charles Jaulnay: *L'enfer burlesque. Le Mariage de Belphegor. Epitaphes de Mr. de Molière*, Cologne, Jean Le Blanc, 1677.

[8] The author discusses at length the influence of the political context in which Barnabe Riche's version appeared as well as some later dramatic works based on the novella, such as the one by William Houghton (*Grim the Collier of Croydon*, 1602 ca.) and the one by Ben Johnson (*The Devil is an Ass*, first performed in 1616). In dealing with matters of faith (the practice of exorcism) and with the misogynist attitudes of the original text the English authors had to alter the content in order to avoid clashes with the court.

[9] Pluto's speech is a typical example of *oratio ficta* [fictional oration], a stylistic device often adopted in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine* (1532).

[10] *Il novellino* (known as *The hundred Old Tales* in English) is an anonymous collection of tales stemming from various sources written in Florence between 1280 and the early 1300's. The work is an antecedent to Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1351 ca.).

[11] Broer Appelaer (Amsterdam 1636 – Utrecht 1685) came from a family of Amsterdam printers. He ran a printing press in Amsterdam with his brother Jan, until he moved to Utrecht, in 1674, where he was appointed as a *courantier* (editor and publisher of a weekly newspaper) by the local authorities.

[12] Grootes suggests the following for a first introduction to the subject of popular literature in England, France and Germany: Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories, Popular fiction and its readership in seventeenth-century England* (1981) and Victor Neuburg, *Popular literature* (1977); Robert Mandrou, *De la culture populaire aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. La Bibliothèque bleue de Troyes*, Paris, Stock (1964) and Geneviève Bollème, *La Bibliothèque bleue*, Paris, Julliard (1971); Wolfgang Brückner (ed.), *Volkserzahlung und Reformation. Ein Handbuch zur Tradierung und Funktion von Frzahlstoffen und Erzähliteratur im Protestantismus*, Berlin: E.Schmidt, 1974 (Grootes 1982-1983: 10).

[13] Dirck Coornhert (1522-1590) Dutch philosopher, translator and artist, published a selection in 1564 (also based on moralistic issues) of 50 novellas from the *Decameron*: **Vijftigh lustighe historien oft nieuwicheden Joannis Boccattij**.

[14] The work was translated into Dutch and published for the first time in Leiden in 1641, as *Recht-back tegen de Ydele, Korzellighe ende Wispeltuyrighe Vrouwen*. Many reprints followed.

[15] Sweerts used in this case his *nom de plume* 'the widower Hippolytus de Vrye' [the free one].

[16] The author identifies himself only with the acronym S.I.E.D.V.M.W.A.S.

[17] *Den verreesen Hippolytus, Ontdekkende De natuur, eygenschappen, sporelose hertstochten, onkuysche liefde, en ydelheit der Vrouwen. Soo met oude als hedendaagse geschiedenissen bekrachtigt. Benefens Een Koeldrank voor alle minsieke malle Vryers*. Uyt het Lat. vert., doch wel een derden deel vermeerderd, en Met aardige kopere Plaatjes verçiert, Amsterdam, Jacob van Royen, 1679.

[18] Paris, Jean Petit-Pas, 1617.

[19] As far as I know, the work having never been the object of detailed research, this source has gone unnoticed until now.

[20] The *Alphabet* is presented as work by the hand of 'P.B. Minnebroeder', a fictitious name devised by the Dutch translator or publisher, hinting at a member of the Franciscan order (as its author in fact was).

[21] All translation from Italian and Dutch are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

[22] Hendrik Laurenszoon Spiegel (1549-1612), a founding member of the Chamber of rhetoric De Eglantier, is probably the author of the anonymous *Twe-spraack vande Nederduitsche letterkunst* (1584), the first treatise on Dutch language and grammar. Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft (1581-1647), poet and playwright, is also the author of a pioneering history of the Dutch revolt against Spain: *De Nederlandsche Historien* (1642). Karel van Mander (1548-1606), painter, poet and translator, is the author of an encyclopedic work on painting, *Het Schilder-boeck* (1604), containing biographies of the ancient, Italian and Dutch and Flemish painters.

[23] The prose production of Gerbrand Adriaenszoon Bredero (1585-1618), best known for the perfectly timed and lively comedies he wrote in the span of his short life, consists of letters, dedications and forewords.

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