



Emma Bologna

Translation and the circulation of Dutch cultural images in Italy

Gentile, Paola: *De beelden van de Lage Landen in Italiaanse vertaling (2000–2020). Selectie, receptie en beeldvorming*. Trieste: EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2021.

Translation plays a crucial role in the spreading of cultural images and shapes the way countries perceive other cultures and think about them. This is a message that runs like a red thread in Paola Gentile's "De beelden van de Lage Landen in Italiaanse vertaling (2000-2020)". In her book, Gentile places translation studies within the context of imagology and explores the literary exchange between Italy and the Low Countries: Flanders and The Netherlands. In her research, she takes four dimensions into consideration: a political, economic, social and cultural dimension. The political dimension is taken into account because institutions such as the *Nederlands Letterenfonds* and *Literatuur Vlaanderen* play a central role in the promotion of Dutch literature. An economic dimension is included because publishers generally have an interest in making profit. A social dimension is furthermore taken into account because contacts between translators, publishers and other stakeholders influence the selection, production and promotion of literary works. Lastly, Gentile's research encompasses a cultural dimension as well, because all these cooperating actors generally keep in mind the preferences and tastes of their audiences. By paying attention to these aspects and exploring the role they play in the literary exchange between the Low Countries and Italy, Gentile is able to create a

wider context for the study of cultural and literary representations of these countries in Italy.

Her work also provides interesting insights into the dynamics and processes that lead to the translation and eventual publication of a literary work. As prof. Dolores Ross perspicaciously points out in her foreword to the book, Gentile has been able to “map for us how a book travels and which path it precisely takes” (12). Through several interviews with translators, publishers and the *letterenfondsen* (literary funds), Gentile offers us a glimpse of how a book is selected, translated and promoted, and which actors are responsible for each of these tasks. The interviews also shed light on the kind of relationships and collaborations that the actors maintain with each other. From her interviews Gentile is able to conclude that translators play a crucial role in the publication process of a book because they have knowledge of both the source and target culture. Therefore, they serve as conduits between literature associations, literary agents and publishers. Gentile points out that Italian publishers often ask translators to recommend them which books would be interesting to bring on the Italian market. In this sense, they have a prominent position in the selection procedure.

An interesting aspect that emerges from Gentile’s research data is that the selection of books is often done on the basis of already existing cultural images of the Low Countries that are all shared by the actors. Thus, subjective factors always play a role in the choices they make. Subsequently, when a work does not present recognizable cultural traits that are associated with the country of origin, the author is often deemed not eligible for publication. This is often the case with Flemish authors; since the Italian public does not have a clear cultural and national image of Flanders, Flemish authors are published less in Italy. Gentile also emphasizes that these actors are sometimes influenced by their own images of the Low Countries and, in recommending promotion strategies to publishers, they contribute to the creation and diffusion of cultural images of the Low Countries in Italy.

One of these actors is Iperborea, an Italian publishing house specialised in the publication of Northern European literature. In her research, Gentile indicates how the establishment of Iperborea has been crucial for the diffusion of Dutch literature in Italy. She points out how, according to the databank of the Dutch *letterenfonds*, Iperborea has translated the largest number of Dutch novels into Italian; it is furthermore the only publishing house with a consistent publication policy for Dutch literature.

Paola Gentile

De beelden
van de Lage Landen
in Italiaanse vertaling
(2000-2020)

Selectie, receptie
en beeldvorming

EUT

The Flemish and Dutch *letterenfondsen* collaborate extensively with Iperborea and define it as the “gatekeeper of Dutch literature.” Gentile in fact points out how their promotion strategies and publications clearly contribute to Dutch cultural branding in Italy. In its paratexts and promotional messages Iperborea often tends to stress the northern features of Dutch and Flemish authors in an attempt to make Italian readers associate these authors with Scandinavian ones. Dutch literature falls within the category of Scandinavian literature for Iperborea.

This publisher also tries to present distinct cultural images of The Netherlands. Gentile analyses an interesting publication in this regard: *The Passenger - Olanda*. This volume is a collection of essays focusing on several topics relevant to The Netherlands and in doing so presents diverse cultural images, both through text, which is written by several Dutch authors and journalists, and through visual elements such as photos. By zooming in on Iperborea, Gentile is able to show how the actors involved in the selection, translation and publication of books influence the circulation of cultural images of the Low Countries in Italy. In short, what makes Gentile’s work innovative and original is that it tries to fill in a knowledge gap concerning cultural and literary representations of the Low Countries in Italy. In doing so, it provides us with fascinating insights into the nature of literary exchanges between these countries and distinctly illustrates how such exchanges come into being and develop within the publishing system.