

'BARBARIC AND UNEDUCATED'? MODESTY UNVEILED IN THE VERNACULAR EDITIONS BY CORNELIS VAN GHISTELE AND DIRCK COORNHERT

Henk Nellen – Steven Surdèl

The Hague, Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis; henk.nellen@huygens.knaw.nl, steven.surdèl@huygens.knaw.nl



Abstract: The article pays attention to the first two Early Modern translators of classical authors in the Low Countries; one a cooper named Cornelis van Ghistele, a member of one of the local chambers of rhetoric, living in Antwerp during the years before the Protestant Revolt against the Spanish king, and the other a secretary of the city of Haarlem and the States of Holland right at the beginning of the Revolt, called Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert. Both these translators had a sincere moral desire to enable a large audience of non-Latinists to get acquainted with the contents and ideas of classical authors – a characteristic phenomenon of the European Renaissance.

Keywords: translations into Dutch – imitatio – aemulatio

With their critical focus on the literary heritage of Classical Antiquity, Renaissance humanists left their mark on an age that tends to be called Early Modern nowadays. In a sense, this qualification seems to be valid: by comparison with the traditional Renaissance or 'rebirth of what has been', Early Modern appears to look forward, announcing an essentially independent and critical approach which inspired later generations in its turn. A distinctive feature of the period was the attempt of leading scholars to spread the word of Classical Antiquity within a larger group of non-Latinists or so-called 'illiterates', for whom this Greco-Roman heritage had to be translated. The effect was nothing less than an intellectual expansion of society, as it allowed a new and ever growing public to rethink and broaden their social, juridical and religious ideas. Conservative forces at the universities and the church of Rome put up a well known and fierce counter movement, but in the long run they could not prevent professionals and amateurs alike to decide consciously for themselves; an attitude which had never been favoured by the rigid educational programs of the Middle Ages.

In the still united Low Countries around the year 1500, school education underwent some fundamental changes, comparable to those in neighbouring countries. Instead of repeating by heart the endless questions and answers in which scholastic teachers liked to revel, young students were suddenly entitled to have some pleasure and imagination of their own. Two forerunners in particular must be mentioned: Rodolphus Agricola, one of the first Dutch humanists to translate Greek, advocated a critical attitude based on doubt and certainty in his *De formandi studio*, and Johannes Murmellius from the southern city of Roermond wrote his *Pappa puerorum*, a textbook with examples of

correct conversational Latin which saw many reprints. Both of them were true philologists who went for the best documentary sources, and their prefaces clearly show how keen they were to correct the many errors that had crept in over the centuries. Deservedly, the editions of Agricola and Murmellius will be treated in detail in our forthcoming volume of *Les Pays-Bas des humanistes*.

When in 2001 the Belgian-Dutch team was asked to make a shortlist for Europa Humanistica, it was felt that this Early Modern impact of both Latin and non-Latin texts should be given the necessary attention. Of course, most of the editors we chose are typical humanists, part of a large European network of Latin and Greek minded editors. But our list also contains two of the first translators in Dutch: Cornelis van Ghistele (Antwerp 1510/1511 – Antwerp 1573) and Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert (Amsterdam 1522 – Gouda 1590). We would like to present them here in Prague, if only because they can be said to impersonate the dichotomy between 'Renaissance' and 'Early Modern'. Van Ghistele was more a man of tradition, who preferred to stay around as an honoured member of one of the refined local chambers of rhetoric in southern Antwerp. Coornhert on the other hand was a non-conformist who was forced twice to seek refuge from the northern province of Holland, after his untamed criticism of those Protestants and Catholics whom he accused to be unduly dogmatic and intolerant. Both men saw their editorial work seriously hampered around 1565 during the first skirmishes of the forthcoming revolt against the Spanish king. Under the circumstances, Van Ghistele seems to have survived with the profit of his local manufacture of barrels, whereas Coornhert, a former secretary of Haarlem and the States of Holland, had nothing to save him except his talent as an engraver.

The question presents itself to what extent their intellectual habits might have been shaped by education. In the case of Van Ghistele, it is a bit of a guess. His natural and long lasting affection for the classics leads us to presume that he may well have passed his early school days at the collegiate church of Our Lady at Antwerp, where a bit of Greek was taught apart from the usual Latin. Of no small importance was the rectorate of Nicolaus Buscoducensis, a true advocate of modern humanist education. We do know for certain however, that in August 1525 a ‘Cornelius de Ghistele de Antwerpia’ was matriculated at the university of Louvain, where rhetorics and stage performances were organised and taught by Hadrianus Barlandus and Martinus Dorpius.¹ But there is no evidence that Van Ghistele ever finished his studies. Nor do we know the names of his personal teachers, although as a student of the Arts he can hardly have failed to profit from the famous Trilingual College that had been founded eight years before his arrival. Whatever knowledge of Greek Van Ghistele may have had, it does not seem to have enabled him to translate his one Greek tragedy from a Greek source.²

Coornhert was meant to follow his father’s career as a commercial trader; when a young man he was not taught Latin and he never learned Greek.³ But he was not a man to give up, and he took up Latin seriously until he was able to translate the original texts *ex fontibus*. The preface to his second edition in Dutch of Boethius’ *Consolation* proves that his early lack of knowledge had frustrated his ambitions: the edition from 1585 was indeed a real translation, contrary to his first one from 1557, for which he grudgingly had to adapt an inferior edition in an ‘obscure’ kind of Flemish (plate 3).⁴ His newly acquired mastery of Latin (at the age of about thirty-five) made him turn furthermore to a Latin translation of Homer’s *Odyssey*, out of which he created his own, rather free version in Dutch.⁵ Apart from Boethius and Homer, Coornhert must also have profited from his knowledge of the Church Fathers, especially when he had to defend himself in public theological debates. If Jerome and Augustine procured him with all those wonderful arguments, who was to tell him that he was wrong?

We hope that these few words may serve as an introduction. Now we would like to touch upon some other aspects of our

two translators: first of all the intentions behind their personal presentation, to be followed by their choice of classical authors and the kind of readers which they had in mind. And last but not least, the strategy to educate these readers.

For the overall intention behind their presentation, we have to look at the prefaces on which our project Europa Humanistica is focused. In both cases, our translators felt the habitual need to apologise with a so-called ‘captatio benevolentiae’, for using such an ‘uneducated’ and ‘barbaric’ language as Dutch. Of course we should not let ourselves be fooled by this kind of modesty. The real aim was to upgrade the vernacular, by proving that Dutch could just as well fit the needs of a story or a play as Latin had once done for the original texts. Van Ghistele in fact puts up a nice as well as convincing excuse: if Terence was never blamed in his days for interpreting ancient Greek comedies, how could he, Van Ghistele, be blamed for doing the same with Terence?⁶ At the same time, Coornhert took his first chance to add a good deal of indignation for a national language that had unjustifiably been ‘buried’ and neglected.⁷

The choice of authors reveals a remarkable difference between our two philologists. Van Ghistele was obviously the man with a lighter touch; his translations of Ovid’s *Heroines*, Horace’s *Sermons* (or *Satyres*) plus the comedies of Terence justify this. Apart from these, he only published one tragedy, i.e. Sophocles’ *Antigone*, as well as the heroic epic of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. By comparison, Coornhert can only be found translating the heroic epic of Homer’s *Odyssey*. But for the rest he clearly preferred philosophical works with a profound social or spiritual message: Boethius’ *Consolation*, Cicero’s *Duties* and Seneca’s *Benefits*, to be followed by his mature translations of Philo’s *Nobility* and a collection of excerpts from Ss. Augustine, Basil, Cyprian and Jerome.

The obvious difference between their favourite authors also illustrates that Van Ghistele and Coornhert each sought a reading public of his own; once again we have to look at the prefaces which they added as an introduction for the reader. They both addressed themselves to local dignitaries, but with different intentions. In his letters to Jacob Herdtzen, the town-major of Antwerp, and to a fellow rhetorician called Gabriel Studelin,⁸ Van Ghistele wants

¹ VINCK-VAN CAEKENBERGHE, M., *Een onderzoek naar het leven, het werk en de literaire opvattingen van Cornelis Van Ghistele (1510/1511–1573), rederijker en humanist* (1996), pp. 23–30.

² For his *Antigone*, Van Ghistele probably used the Latin translation by the Frisian humanist George Rataller. VINCK-VAN CAEKENBERGHE (1996), p. 266.

³ BONGER, H., *Leven en werk van D. V. Coornhert* (1978), pp. 21–24. Some personal testimonies to this particular lack of knowledge can be found in a thesis by VAN DER MEER, S., *Bijdrage tot het onderzoek naar klassieke elementen in Coornhert’s Wellevenskunste* (1934), p. 7, n. 2.

⁴ ‘(...) dit was by my al omtrent dertigh jaren nu gheleden verduytscht uyt oude ende duystere Vlaamsche tale in Neerlandsch, maar zo zeer schandelycken mesdruckt alst boexken eeren waardigh is (...)’. See the preface to *Boëthius, Van de vertroosting der wysheyd, uyt t’Latyn op nieuw vertaalt* (1585).

⁵ The *Dolinge van Ulysse* from 1561 only contained the first twelve books. Coornhert mainly used the Latin translation (next to the original Greek) from 1551 by Casparus, abbot of the monastery of St. Blasien in Germany. WEEVERS, TH., *Coornhert’s dolinge van Ulysse. De eerste Nederlandsche Odyssee* (1934), pp. 2–3 and BONGER (1978), p. 364.

⁶ In his letter to Gabriel Studelin, prince of the rhetorical chamber ‘De Goudbloem’, Van Ghistele mentions several Roman authors who deliberately wrote in the same manner as the earlier Greek writers: ‘(...) Waer af Livius Andronicus de aldereerste gheweest is, die Latijnsche comedien nader Griecxser maniere gheschreven heeft, ende binnen Roomen doen spelen anno vijfhondert dertien na dat Roomen ghesticht was, te weten omtrent twee hondert jaren voor Cristus’ gheboorte. Ende nae hem quamen Ennius, Naevius, Pacuvius, Accius, Cecilius, Plautus ende Terentius (...)’. See *Terentius Comedien. Nu eerst wt den Latine in onser Duytscher talen door Cornelis van Ghistele rethorikelijck over ghesedt, vol goeder leeringhen ende playsant om lesen* (1555).

⁷ See his letter to the reader in: *Officia Ciceronis, leerende wat yeghelijck in allen staten behoort te doen, bescreven int Latijn door den alder welsprekensten orator Marcum Tullium Ciceronem ende nu eerst vertaelt in Nederlantscher spraken door Dierick Coornhert* (1561).

⁸ See the prefaces to *Der Griecxser princerssen, ende jonckvrouwen clachtige sendbrieven, Heroïdum Epistolae ghenaeamt, bescreven duer den geleerden ende vermaerden poet Ovidius Naso inden Latijne, ende nu eerst in Duytsche duer Cornelis van Ghistele rhetorijckelijck overgesedt, (...)* (1553) and *Terentius Comedien* (cf. n. 6).

everyone to know that his translations of Ovid and Terence were not only meant for study and refined literary amusement, but also to be performed in public: in his eyes, young people should better relish the irony of a well bred Roman like Terence than the rough and vulgar jokes in Flemish street plays.⁹ Readers in general again are given a careful warning in his preface to *Antigone*, stating that, in the end, crudeness and tyranny shall always be punished; a commonly understandable hint in those days to the first signs of Spanish arrogance and unilateral decisions under King Philip II. Obviously, both translators had a good idea on what level of society they wanted their ideals to be cared for: like Van Ghistele, Coornhert assured himself of the support of the local mayor, in this case Jan van Zuren of Haarlem, who had joined him as a partner in their common printing office.¹⁰

Coornhert also wrote for the public stage, but there is only scarce evidence that his itchy moralistic plays were performed more or less regularly.¹¹ His concern as a playwright was of course with the individual citizen, but apart from this he had an almost incurable desire to convince the political and theological establishment of his purifying ideals. Contrary to the compliant and successful Van Ghistele, Coornhert changed his attitude towards the chambers of rhetorics from an outright dislike at first to an outspoken respect for his 'brothers' at De Egelantier in 1585.¹² As a young man, he complained that showing off with Latin and French embellishments could only detract from a national and commonly understandable Dutch language, especially in case of legal decisions.¹³ This linguistic purism does not come as a surprise. There was an old resentment in the Low Countries against French speaking officials; first under the Dukes of Burgundy (1382–1485) and later under the Habsburg monarchy (1482–1581/1795). Such political bias is not to be found with Van Ghistele, who seems to have been concerned mainly to create an elegant and well sounding text, even if it contained some niceties of foreign design.¹⁴

Having touched upon the overall intentions, the choice of classical authors and the preferred audience of our two translators, we would now like to turn to the educational programme with which they tried to elevate the level of common knowledge. Their first aim was to put an end to an old prejudice towards the Greek and Roman pagans or 'non-believers' from Classical Antiquity, who had not been able to partake in Christian revelation. Like for Aeneas in Van Ghistele's translation of Virgil, it was for Coornhert's Ulysses to prove that pre-Christian authors should not beforehand be discredited, because their texts often showed them to possess noble spirits like any good Christian.¹⁵ Were these ancient heroes also not a perfect illustration of the great possibilities of mankind under the guidance of divine providence? Neither Coornhert nor Van Ghistele hesitated to look at it this way, and they happily decided to put the unique wisdom of the Christian God in place of the pagan powers once coming from Mount Olympus.¹⁶ And if there might be any doubt among Van Ghistele's readers as to the value of his light-hearted comical plays, he kindly reminds them that plays of exactly the same sort were already held in high esteem well over 1750 years before.¹⁷ Van Ghistele also liked to teach true critical scholarship, by advocating the need to check whatever appears to be convincing when a closer investigation might well prove the opposite. In his introduction to Virgil for example, he warns his audience not to believe popular legends without any historical proof, like the story that the Roman author himself was seen dangling in a basket right underneath the bedroom window of his beloved imperial princess.¹⁸

Coornhert was a man who liked to be strict, for himself as well as for others. Not surprisingly, his early favourites were Cicero, Seneca and Boethius, whose appeals for a clear public and private conscience must have been quite to his liking. But his preference was also based on his personal desire to find the best advocates for the philosophical legacy of Stoicism.¹⁹ Except for its determinism, this philosophy served Coornhert as a fundamental basis for the

⁹ In his letter to the reader in his translation from 1555 (cf. n. 6), Van Ghistele writes: 'Ist niet beter dat de slechte menschen in ons ghemeyn sprake de gheleerde poeten lesen moghen, dan dat si haer met ulespieghels beuselen oft met soedanighen boeverye veronleghende zijn?'.

¹⁰ Coornhert's first edition in Haarlem was his translation of Cicero's *Duties* (cf. n. 7) In his preface to Jan van Zuren, we can read that he had chosen this particular text out of gratitude for the kind support he had received.

¹¹ According to the thesis of A. C. G. FLEURKENS, Coornhert must have written at least ten plays: *Stichtelijke lust. De toneelspelen van D.V. Coornhert (1522–1590) als middelen tot het geven van morele instructie* (1994), pp. 30–35 and 118–375.

¹² FLEURKENS (1994), p. 42.

¹³ See the letter to the reader in Coornhert's translation of Cicero's *Duties* (cf. n. 7).

¹⁴ VAN DEN BRANDEN, L., *Het streven naar verheerlijking, zuivering en opbouw van het Nederlands in de 16e eeuw* (1956) (Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde, series VI, nr. 77), pp. 33–34 and 63.

¹⁵ Van Ghistele's letter to the reader in his translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* from 1555 illustrates this admiration: '(...) want alle Heydensche Philosophen ende Poeten, al en hebben si gheen kennisse van Christo ghehad, nochtans haer groote wijsheyt ende verstant hebben si wel laten blijcken, alsoo wy duer haer goede ende gheleerde sententien daghelijcx noch bevroeden mueghen (...)'. See VINCK-VAN CAEKENBERGHE (1996) p. 663. And in Coornhert's *Vander Heydenen salicheyt* we read: 'Merct zy [i.e. the opponent, H.N.] dan niet, dat zy altsamen Christum selve met zyne godtlycke schatten niet en hebben in herten, die wel zyn historiale kennisse verbeeldelyckerwyse in der hersenen dragen?'. See: BUYS, R., "Holla alle Heydenen en zijn gheen godtloosen gheweest noch onsaligh" -Coornhert en het redelijke alternatief", in: GRUPPELAAR, J. and VERWEY, G., *D.V. Coornhert (1522–1590): polemist en vredeszoeker. Bijdragen tot plaatsbepaling en herwaarding* (2010), pp. 13–34, esp. p. 21.

¹⁶ On the replacement of the pagan gods by the Christian God, see VAN MARION, O., *Heldinnenbrieven. Ovidius' Heroides in Nederland* (2005) p. 75 and BONGER (1978), p. 126. In the preface of Seneca's *Benefits*, Coornhert explicitly states: 'Ick hebbe in dese boeckkens ghestelt God voor goden, op dat dese godtlijcke leeringhen duer der goden hatelijcheyt huer vruchtbaerheyt niet en souden verliesen.' See *Lucius Anneus Seneca, Van den weldaden. Leerende den rechten aert van broederlijke liefde, getrouwe vrientschappe ende beleefde huesscheyt, voor allen staten seer oorbaerlijc om lesen* (1562).

¹⁷ Cf. n. 6.

¹⁸ According to F. KOCH, this legend originated in the 13th century: 'Vergil im Korbe', in: Gramberg, W.G.A. (ed.), *Festschrift für Erich Meyer zum sechzigsten Geburtstag. 29 Oktober 1957* (1957), pp. 105–121.

¹⁹ VAN DER MEER (1934), pp. 10–13 mentions Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca and Boethius as Coornhert's main inspirators.

development of his own ideas; ideas that came down on religious tolerance and the development of personal virtue. In his eyes, Cicero was the right man to teach the ruling classes the virtue of good government, just as he preferred the moral superiority of Seneca with his denial of dubious gifts. But most of all he liked to take recourse to the arguments of the Church Fathers, particularly in his polemics against Jean Calvin and his fellow Protestants in Holland, as well as against the States of that province, who accused him of undermining the unity of a nation in revolt. By quoting Paul the apostle in his letter to the Corinthians, Coornhert warns against any rigid, purely formal interpretation of texts that might kill the overall, essential message.²⁰ In the same spirit, he urged those who govern society to set an example for their citizens: people should feel that decisions need to be based on proper judgment. Coornhert supports this by quoting a story of Philo Judaeus, who tells us about a king who on a hot day visited his cavalry. When he found his captains laying about resting and drinking, while his horsemen were playing a ball game wearing their heavy armour, he at once made the captains and the horsemen change ranks.²¹

In religious matters, Coornhert no doubt disqualified himself with the traditional Calvinists by stating that, thanks to God's mercy, every individual has the rightful task to strive for a kind of perfection. (We could add: just as Ulysses and Aeneas did in ancient times.) In his view, Man was not necessarily born with a corrupted nature, like so many protestant theologians would have it.²² But there was more to it: Coornhert's independent conclusion that mortal Man is very well capable to choose between good and evil because he can learn virtue, an idea that was inspired by his incorporation of stoicism into Christianity.²³ It explains his deep personal concern for the intrinsic dignity of each individual soul, particularly if set against the superficial value of earthly wealth. Boethius and Augustine had taught him this, together with a deep notion that wisdom and reason enable the soul to withstand poverty or physical pain, like Boethius himself had felt when he was in prison. It is just one passage out of many that can testify to the large and living classical heritage behind Coornhert's own major opus on morality, i.e. *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste* (1586).²⁴

If we have a look at the technical aspects of the translations, it is important to realise that Early Modern standards do not match modern ones. With regard to their readers, translators

rather preferred a kind of 'storytelling in translation', as it has been called.²⁵ Putting Van Ghistele and Coornhert to the test, we find striking differences but also similarities in their approach.²⁶ In his metrical translation of Ovid's *Heroines* for example, Van Ghistele allowed himself great liberties (plate 2). For practical, educational and literary reasons he kept to the usual demands of 'imitatio', by shortening, enlarging, substituting and simplifying the original text.²⁷ Being aware of the fact that Dutch usually needs more words than Latin to express the same thing, he tried as best he could to keep the body of verses strictly within limits. But Van Ghistele also chose to leave out many of Ovid's mythological details, because he wanted his readers to concentrate on his main intention to present the *Heroines* as an ethical manual for good behaviour. This concern had another important consequence, as he felt free to add passages about the moods and feelings of his protagonists. Upon this he inserted more than a few spicy expressions and sayings, in order to put more stress on the ethical message.

It is well known among historians of philology that, like paraphrases, translations like these must be considered within the usual literary attempt of most humanists to imitate the favoured names of Classical Antiquity. This applies even more to Van Ghistele, who apparently tried to raise this level of imitation to what is called 'aemulatio'. As a closer look at the *Heroines* reveals, he enriched the original corpus with a number of letters of his own hand, allegedly composed as a response by the male lovers of Ovid's own female heroines. He even took the liberty to add two letters of his own in which he introduced a new pair of lovers, namely Helen and Menelaos, a couple which as such does not feature in Ovid's works.²⁸ By adding these letters, Van Ghistele must have felt that he completed the corpus as it should be done. What is more, by competing with Ovid he produced original poems with a high level of originality and quality.²⁹ It certainly is not easy to trace the precise impact of this kind of poetry, but the sheer number of editions adds to the plausibility that Van Ghistele's translations must have been quite popular. And there is an even stronger argument that, in the sixteenth as well as in the seventeenth century, his translations reached large segments of the educated reading public: many of his letters entered a new life as a leading content in popular songs which lived on in a large number of later editions.³⁰ As a consequence, audiences in

²⁰ 2 Cor. 3,6.

²¹ See the preface to Coornhert's translation of Philo's *Nobility: Van edelheyt. Een edel boecxken by Philonem Judaeum over 1580 jaren gemaect, ende nu int jaer 1583 vertaelt door D.V. Coornaert* (1583).

²² BONGER (1978), pp. 181–203 gives a detailed analysis of Coornhert's idea's on how to reach perfection, in particular by taking the steps of an imaginative ladder on pp. 190–193.

²³ That Man may well choose between virtue and evil, is mentioned in book IV, 12, 40 of Coornhert's *Zedekunst* (cf. n. 24 hereafter); see VAN DER MEER (1934), p. 114.

²⁴ Bruno Becker published the first (and only) modern edition of Coornhert's book: D. V. Coornhert, *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste: vermits waarheyds kennisse vanden mensche, vande zonden ende vande dueghden nu alder eerst beschreven int Neerlandsch* (1942; photomech. repr. 1982).

²⁵ 'Storytelling in translation', or 'vertalend navertellen', was a description used by W.A.P. Smit in his analysis of Van Ghistele. See SMIT (1975), p. 212 (cf. n. 26 hereafter).

²⁶ The best introduction to Van Ghistele and Coornhert as translators is W.A.P. SMIT, *Kalliope in de Nederlanden. Het Renaissancistisch-Klassicistische epos van 1550 tot 1850*, vol. 1 (1975), pp. 252–295 (Van Ghistele's *Aeneid*) and 343–373 (Coornhert's *Odyssey*). See also VINCK-VAN CAEKENBERGHE (1996), pp. 343–373 and BONGER 1978, pp. 358–389.

²⁷ JANSEN, J., *Imitatio: literaire navolging (imitatio auctorum) in de Europese letterkunde van de renaissance (1500–1700)* (2008).

²⁸ VAN MARION (2005), pp. 77–82.

²⁹ See VAN MARION (2005), p. 81.

³⁰ On pp. 450–469, VINCK-VAN CAEKENBERGHE (1996) mentions *D'Boeck der Amoreusheyt, Nieu Amstelredams Lied-boeck* and *Princesse Liet-boec*.

tow boats, market halls, brothels and taverns could listen to and sing along with Ovid's moral warnings, like: if you really want to enjoy a happy life, you have to do it on a modest scale. For the incautious who tend to give in easily to the lust of love and passion, life shall end in misery.

How about our second man, Dirck Coornhert? The best we can use are his translations of Homer's *Odyssey*, Seneca's *Benefits* and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. His *Odyssey*, based as it was on a Latin translation, shows a constant inclination to embellish the language and to facilitate the understanding of what is told. Being a painter, Coornhert liked to enliven a particular sad or happy mood by adding various remarks about colours, sunlight and shadows. An illustrious garden on one of the famous Greek isles is suddenly transformed into a nice and peaceful Dutch setting with native flowers and herbs all neatly arranged, to which the readers of his own days were well acquainted.³¹

In his translation of Seneca's *Benefits*, Coornhert allowed himself a surprising flexibility: to enable his readers to distinguish the various participants in this typical antique dialogue, he admits to have added the expressions 'he said' and 'I said', although Seneca himself did not use them. He also admits to have changed the setting in favour of the one Christian God instead of the many ancient ones.³² Of a different and much more serious kind is his translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. Book V, chapter 4 serves as a good example, because Coornhert quoted essential parts of it in his major work on ethics that he wrote during the last years of his life, the before mentioned *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste*.³³ This particular passage concerns a topic that was very important not only to Coornhert himself, but also to many adepts of the Reformation: the relation between providence and free will. A detailed comparison of the original text and the translation proves that Coornhert's command of Latin enabled him to give an essentially correct translation that faithfully follows the original; apart from one or two slight deviations and – perhaps – one misinterpretation, Coornhert exactly managed to render the logics of Boethius, despite the intricacy and complexity of the original line of thought. Technically, Boethius' *Consolation* is a Menippean satire, characterized by alternating sections of prose and verse. Coornhert, himself a poet in his own right, chose to preserve the metrical form: he faithfully translated verses into verses, thereby adding the presumed melodies in staff notation, an indication that the verses were meant to be sung (plate 1). We would like to refer again to the difficult poetry of the *Consolation* book V, chapter 4, where the idea of man's mind as a *tabula rasa* is discussed; Coornhert really presents a transfer in understandable Dutch rhyme. The intent behind this must have been analogous to the one of Van Ghistele: Coornhert's idea was that the original philosophical and ethical lessons would stay in the people's mind far more easily if they were expressed in a natural sounding kind of verse.

A quick view on the editions of both men's translations is enough not to be over-zealous about their after-life, although in some cases the number of reprints is quite impressive. As we explained, Van Ghistele's fame rested mainly on Ovid's *Heroines*, of which eighteen editions are known between 1553 and 1656. They are followed by Virgil's *Aeneid*, with seven editions between 1554 and 1609. Horace, Sophocles and even Terence's *Comedies* are all limited to one or two editions, and did not make it into the 17th century. According to the relevant bibliographies, they seem to have been almost the only available Dutch translations in the sixteenth century.³⁴ The same goes for Coornhert's translations, even though some of them did make it into the next century, like Boethius' *Consolation* (6 eds.), Cicero's *Duties* (5 eds.), Homer's *Odyssey* (6 eds.) and Seneca's *Benefits* (2 eds.). These editions did not suffer any competition from other contemporary Dutch translations, which does not necessarily imply that they were not really sought after. The real demand may well come to the fore if we take into consideration that they might have been used as models for independent texts of a slightly different character, like popular drama; a subject which falls outside the scope of our project Europa Humanistica.

If we were asked to conclude upon this subject, one might say that Van Ghistele and Coornhert did indeed bear the brunt among those who tried to spread the message of the classical heritage in the Early Modern age. And the job was certainly not an easy one, considering the enormous cultural distance between the ideas and visions of their own age and those from Antiquity. After all, they were both more than normal teachers, given their honest intention to educate the masses with a well prepared mixture of the best fruit of classical culture with the basic tenets of the Christian message. In order to bridge the gap for those who could not read Greek or Latin, they had to occupy themselves intensely with the best sources they could get, however limited their choice must have been. But their sincerity drove them to make the best of it, convinced as they were of the inherent and lasting moral value for their own religious, social and political life and times.

Bibliography

- BONGER, H., *Leven en werk van D. V. Coornhert* (1978), Amsterdam, Van Oorschot.
- BUYS, R., "Holla alle Heydenen en zijn gheen godtloosen gheweest noch onsaligh" – Coornhert en het redelijke alternatief", in: Gruppelaar, J. and Verwey, G. (eds.), *D. V. Coornhert (1522–1590): polemist en vredeszoeker. Bijdragen tot plaatsbepaling en herwaardering* (2010), Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, pp. 13–34.
- COORNHERT, D. V., *Zedekunst dat is wellevenskunste: vermits waarheyds kennisse vanden mensche, vande zonden ende vande dueghden nu alder eerst beschreven int Neerlandsch*. Uitgegeven en van aantekeningen

³¹ Examples are to be found in WEEVERS (1934), pp. 120–121 and SMIT (1975), p. 290.

³² Cf. n. 16.

³³ Cf. n. 24.

³⁴ The *Dutch Short Title Catalogue* and the bibliography by DE RYNCK, P. and WELKENHUYSEN, A., *De Oudheid in het Nederlands* (1992, with a supplement from 1997) are the best to be consulted.

- voorzien door B. Becker (1942), Leiden, E. J. Brill (photomech. repr. 1982).
- DE RYNCK, P. and WELKENHUYSEN, A., *De Oudheid in het Nederlands* (1992, with a supplement from 1997), Amsterdam, Ambo.
- FLEURKENS, A. C. G., *Stichtelijke lust. De toneelspelen van D. V. Coornhert (1522–1590) als middelen tot het geven van morele instructie* (1994), Hilversum, Verloren (thesis)
- JANSEN, J., *Imitatio: literaire navolging (imitatio auctorum) in de Europese letterkunde van de Renaissance (1500–1700)* (2008), Hilversum, Verloren.
- KOCH, F., 'Vergil im Korbe', in: Gramberg, W. G. A. (ed.), *Festschrift für Erich Meyer zum sechzigsten Geburtstag. 29 Oktober 1957* (1957), Hamburg, Hauswedell.
- SMIT, W. A. P., *Kalliope in de Nederlanden. Het Renaissancistisch-Klassicistische epos van 1550 tot 1850*, vol. 1 (1975), Assen, Van Gorcum.
- VAN DEN BRANDEN, L., *Het streven naar verheerlijking, zuivering en opbouw van het Nederlands in de 16e eeuw* (1956), Gent, Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde, series VI, nr. 77.
- VAN DER MEER, S., *Bijdrage tot het onderzoek naar klassieke elementen in Coornhert's Wellevenskunste* (1934), Amsterdam, Huisman en Hanenburg (thesis)
- VAN MARION, O., *Heldinnenbrieven. Ovidius' Heroides in Nederland* (2005), Nijmegen, Vantilt (thesis)
- VINCK-VAN CAEKENBERGHE, M., *Een onderzoek naar het leven, het werk en de literaire opvattingen van Cornelis Van Ghistele (1510/1511–1573), rederijker en humanist* (1996), Gent, Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde.
- WEEVERS, TH., *Coornhert's dolinghe van Ulysse. De eerste Nederlandsche Odyssee* (1934), Groningen, Wolters (thesis)



1. Fragment from book V, 4 of Coornhert's second translation of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* from 1585 (Leiden UL 689 F 10 (1))

Der Griexser

Princerffen/ en Jonckvrouwen clachtige Sendt
briuen / Heroidum Epistolæ gheuaempt/
bescreuen duer den geleerden en vermaer-
den Poet Ouidius Naso inden Latij-
ne/ en nu eerst in Duytsche duer
Cornelis van Ghistele a he-
torijckelijc ouergeset/ seer
Playsant om lesen.

¶ Anderwerf ghecorrigeert ende noch daer by
ghestelt twee Epistelen/ die welcke Nulus
Sabinus heeft beschreuen.



Gheprint Thantwerpen by Hans de Laet.

M. D. L. V.

Met Gratię ende Priuilegie.

Die vertroue

stinghe der Wyssheyt / tot troest
vanden bedroeffden Raedt vanden onuer
standigen / vnd int gemeen tot alder mens
schen salicheit / Doer den hoechgeleerden
vnde Godverstandigen Boethium /
Raedis heer tot Romen / ouer
duysent jaren beschreuen /
Namals wt den Latyne
verduydischt / vnde
nu nyeu ghes
druct

Tho Deuen

ter met Consent burgemeistern Scepen vñ
Raide / myt vryheit in vier jaren naest fol
gende niet nae tho drucken / by verbdringe
der bueckeren / vñ tho erkentniß Scepen vñ
Raide gestrafft tho worden.

By Symon Steinberghen.

1 5 5 7.